



# THE SAD AND THE GLAD

OF KISHORE KUMAR



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Presented by  
The Times of India  
In association with  
**Research Centre for Cinema Studies**  
(Affiliated to the NFAI)



The Times of India re-presents

# THE SAD AND THE GLAD

OF KISHORE KUMAR

In homage –on his first death anniversary  
Nehru Centre, 17-22 October 1988

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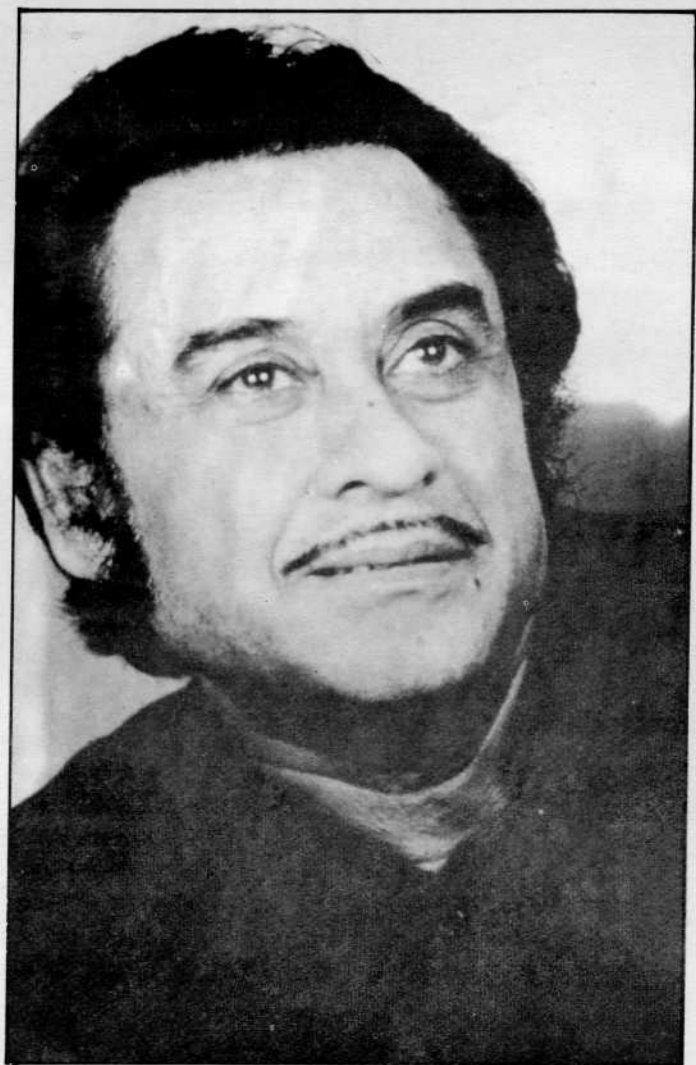


Karodpati

## CONTENTS

Page No.

Preface	9
The Fear And The Angst	11
The Melody	21
The Performance	48
The Statement	63
Projecting Away	91
Kishore Kumar's filmography	109



## PREFACE

It's a complicated procedure, usually - to find an integrity to so multifaceted an individual as Kishore Kumar was. Singer, actor, comedian-satirist perhaps without a real parallel in the Indian cinema, music director and composer, he was to participate in taking each of these areas into separate and major industries. He was part of this maelstrom ever since he started work, in a new generation of post-Independence cinema, and then he was to embody it - as India's best-known and highest priced male playback singer, as a performer that took the song-dance-comedy routine to the stage to participate in initiating the era of disco dancing and gigantic live concerts, with all that it implies to modern India.

At its least, the phenomenon signposts the coming of age of modern mass-culture in India. He would not have been possible without the radio; he was part of a concerted process that took entertainment, and its inescapable abstraction, music, to go beyond the bounds of regional capital and regional culture. He was finally the era of the great music directors, as fundamental an intervening into how Indian films could be made as the mythologicals of the silent era, the so-called 'socials' of P.C. Barua and the New Theatres filmmakers and the 'realists' who followed.

The last thing this book intends to do is to create yet another auteur to an already overbloated list. Kishore Kumar, however, has become a cross-current of so many kinds of discourses that it becomes fertile territory for an investigation into just how the modern was mediated into post-Independence India. His films are in fact considerably more complex narrative formations than most people seem to realise, not just in the staggering range of sources from which they borrow but the dimensions to which they can take a near-plotless scenario, holding its continuities through pure gesture. Kishore Kumar had somehow won for himself the freedom to intervene into the narrative, take it into practically any direction he wished, often revealing in the process its sheer arbitrariness, with-

out ever violating certain quite determined generic norms. The extraordinary bit is these norms are within him, are often him, in the way he configured himself as he slipped through his various roles and guises. Equally interesting, everyone has an opinion on the man - everyone has responded to some degree to the encapsulated mess of industry and craftsmanship he represented. The way he is spoken about is in itself an interesting range against which to mount an investigation.

This book has been a strange, sometimes unique, experience for those who have helped put it together. Our investigation has led inexorably to the **man**, to his eccentricities, his reputation, channelled through the people we met - and the manner in which we met them; the difficulties we encountered, the facades of narcissism we had to sometimes blindly meander through. This is generally a dangerous method, one that privileges the subjectivities and quixoticisms of an individual, and thus merely reinforces the established hierarchies that, as our evidence hopefully shows, Kishore Kumar himself sought to overthrow. We found it difficult to square the singing superstar with the essentially B-grade status accorded to the films he made; we found it difficult to match the allegedly 'crazy' man with his own, often documented, desires to be 'taken seriously'. Clearly there is more at stake in all this. This book does not intend to suppress any of these discourses. Indeed, it is for the first time that we, in the RCCS, are dealing with a theme that has such a surfeit of them. The book does make a skeletal effort to construe them into a kind of line, but with the awareness, and pleasure, of knowing that there is nothing to appropriate here. And that there **is** something to celebrate.

It is also, in a sense, a reconstruction - different people are doing it in their own way, and it necessarily combines with reflection and revaluation a tinge of nostalgia. For an era that Kishore Kumar's death brought to a close.



**1.**

**THE FEAR  
AND  
THE ANGST**

**Khalid Mohamed**



His was a voice set free. Above all, a music man, he was an entertainer. He was popular but without pandering to the rah-rah, give-us-our-daily-kicks benches. His struggle, his battles with the sappy showbiz elements were laid to rest a year ago with his departure. He wrote his own comedy, his own tragedy - the story of a boy who became a man who became a cult only to be devoured, Dionysus-like, by some beyond-his-control, self-destructive bent.

Kishore Kumar was considered eccentric sometimes, sometimes a genius. The truth perhaps lay in between. Supremely gifted, he had to deal with charlatans, people who didn't know the craft or the art of the medium they were dealing with. They looked up to him for redemption, naturally he was wont to treat them with a bit of mischief, a bit of contempt even. In his dancing eyes, in his exquisitely sing-song speaking voice, in his light-hearted, quick-witted banter, you could hear the troubled vibe. The aching blue note. He could, whenever the mood grabbed him, sing with a tear in his voice. He could have the cosmic blues. His low phrases could be deep as a valley you suspect, his heartaches hidden and prolonged. His romantic aura brings to mind an artist half-in-love with despair.

He would emerge from his reclusiveness to play in the park of the recording centres, and the studio lights. Wanderlust would lead him to perform at concerts, in London and Los Angeles, though he always came back to his fiercely guarded bungalow in Juhu, just a stroll away from the once-deserted beachside, now an enclave for Sunday holiday-makers. And it was to his home that they brought him when he died, to his posters and pictures of Charlie Chaplin, fluffy dogs, Persian cats, among his gigantic video collection of horror movies, and so many discs and cassettes which he would lend an ear to wherever there was a break from the career's hurly burly.

He could be a charmer. He could be melancholic. The maturation of the singer-performer was impressive to watch. From ranking third or fourth in the chart of playback singers, he progressed to become a very personal singer, songwriter and composer of pieces that revealed broad skills and even broader ambitions. If Kishore Kumar had not entirely shaken off the callowness of earlier outings, his later work still represented a breakthrough. Strong and authorial, his voice developed confidence, establishing him as a peer. In fact, he became the first film singer to show an interest in bridging the gap between pop music and serious music.

Rooted in the simple strains of the 1940s, he moved instinctively towards the electronic beat of the eclectic 80s. Restlessness was also the key to his personality; he was an innately conservative man who wanted to be a swinger. He would be an iconoclast, too, and had an understandable mistrust for institutions. What had the system ever done for him? The movies often meant crassness and he had to rise above that. If it brought money and sunshine, they were fringe benefits.

He could mimic a rock-and-roll or ghazal star. He had fun, he could jeer and jibe at others because they didn't have the class and they accumulated more honours and awards than they deserved. His unaffected pleasure in a solo performance, before the mike, on stage or in front of the camera, surprised everyone. He seemed to be grateful to his audience, anxious to please. How does he do it, you'd wonder, where does that energy and elan come from? It possibly had to do with the absence of snobbery that's associated with artistry. He appeared to be so unspeakably relieved to have been sprung from the prison of anonymity that he married his audience and moved in.

Kishore Kumar was just in time for any generation. He danced and sang just the way you wanted to feel, he made you escape from the bleakness of the conditions. He could

combine the lowest common denominator with the highest common factor. Like Mohammed Rafi, he sent out sounds that reverberate within, uniting so many hearts without apparent effort. It's true that sometimes he did not catch the listener right in the lead belly. But he was not too young to love or to console the tired spirit, and he kept up the whistle on the long, long way to your very own Tipperary.

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Born on August 4, 1929, he died on October 13, 1987. In his 58 years he had become a paradox. A mask of tragedy and comedy rolled into one. Son of Kunjbehari Ganguly, a barrister from Khandwa in Madhya Pradesh, his story begins in 1951. A man in his early 20s, he left home for Bombay, where elder brother Ashok was already a major star. That, young Kishore thought, was the ticket to a meeting with his all-time hero K.L. Saigal.

The fan never got to meet Saigal but he was persuaded to stay back in the city where fame and fortune are up for grabs. Later their brother Anoop joined the movies too and played supporting roles, the trio teaming up in 1958 for **Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi**, perhaps the most uproarious comedy to be confected in the Indian studios.

But before that, Kishore Kumar had established himself as what was then known as the 'singing star'. This meant that he did his own playback singing instead of depending on a ghost voice. Among his earlier lot of films, he always had a certain regard for **Bhai Bhai**, **Bandi**, **Lookochuri**, **Shachuri**, **Shararat**, **Musafir**, **Asha** with that super stomper of a song, **Eena Meena Deeka**, and **New Delhi**. He also gave a bulk of the credit to filmmaker M.V. Raman for encouraging him to take on the role of an actor in an era when the premium was on Greek-god looks, or what came to be known as 'chocolate faces'.





**Shararat**

Actually, Kishor Kumar was crooning a number for Raman's film **Bahar** when the filmmaker was floored by his saucy style of singing and cast him in his next production **Ladki**.

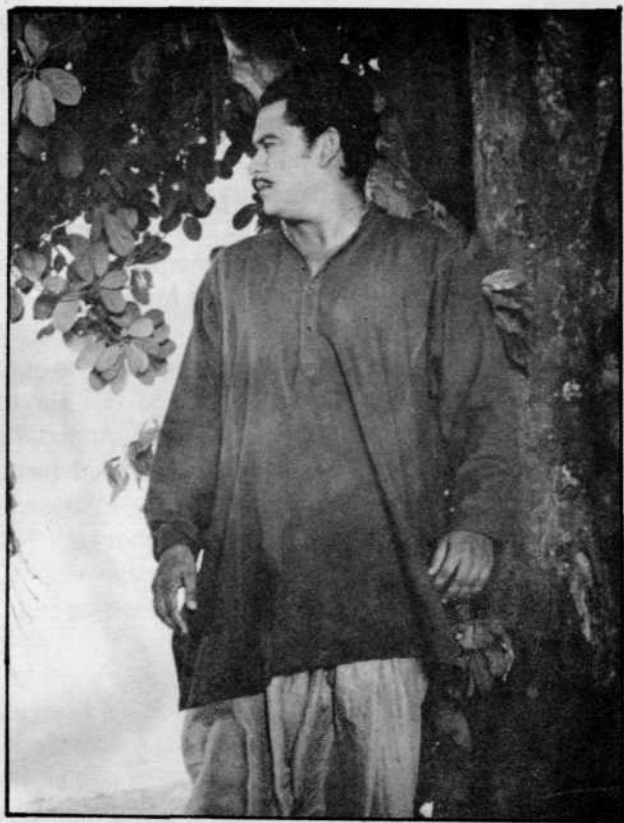
He had acted before but had gone virtually unnoticed in the support of brother Ashok Kumar opposite Veena in **Shikari**. Neither did roles in **Andolan** and **Tamasha** help him any. It was **Ladki** and **Lehren** directed by H.S. Rawail that brought for him a cloudburst of applause. The veteran director of the times. R.C. Talwar, cast him

opposite Meena Kumari in **Ilzaam** while Bimal Roy used him as representative of the unemployed youth in **Naukri**. Came the hilarious **Baap Re Baap** in 1955 and Kishore Kumar found a place in tinsel town as actor-singer-cum-comedian. Then, there were **New Delhi**, **Naya Andaz**, **Miss Mary**, **Begunah** (in which he did a take-off of Danny Kaye's act in **Knock On Wood**), **Dilli Ka Thug** and once again the unemployed youth in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's debut feature **Munimji**.

Around the same time he became the voice for Dev Anand when his songs for **Paying Guest** became juke-box delights. For Dev Anand, his numbers in **Munimji** were also instant hits. Earlier he had sung for the star in **Baazi**. On screen, his one-man laugh riots continued, culminating in the belly-cluncher **Half Ticket**. As the black-and-white era faded, Kishore Kumar went slow on his acting assignments, popping up only to do an occasional **Padosan**. He almost quit acting, except in his own home productions, preferring to concentrate on playback singing. There was a lean phase followed by a whopping comeback with the release of **Aradhana** in 1969. If he had been Dev's voice earlier, he now became the ghost for Rajesh Khanna, the country's first acknowledged super-star.

It would be futile to compile a list of the golden numbers Kishore Kumar had done down the decades. But the oldies from **Funtoosh**, **Rim Jhim**, **Fareb**, **Jhumroo** in which he acted, sang and also composed music, **Mr X In Bombay**, have a special resonance. So do his later renditions in **Guide**, **Amar Prem**, **Mehbooba**, **Khamoshi**, **Mili** and **Saagar**. And all these precious melodies from a man who had no formal training, no guru and, it is said, he never ever learnt to read the notations. He did not feel the need to.

His directorial efforts ranged from the introspective **Door** **Gagan Ki Chaon Mein** and the semi-autobiographical



### Door Gagan Ki Chaor Mein

**Shaabash Daddy** to the bizarre **Badhti Ka Naam Daadhi**.

He could talk eruditely of film craft or he could crack corny jokes (most often aimed against income-tax officers), he liked talking to the trees (or so he said), and he liked proclaiming that he was a teetotaler and a non-smoker. It was work, evidently, that sent him on a high. At one point, he was recording as many as five songs in a day.

Kishore Kumar would not get bulldozed. The most striking example of this was V.C. Shukla's ban on his songs from radio and television during the Emergency. He had

re'used to publicise the 20-Point Programme. The axe fell on him but he didn't seem to care. When the clouds lifted, Shukla had to make a public apology.

Colourful, Kishore Kumar could be. Decked up in Hawaiian shirts once, he had then taken to the silk kurta-lungi and a white fur cap for stage shows. He liked to be dapper for he laughed, otherwise his wife wouldn't care for him. He married four times, and each time it was to a beautiful actress: Ruma Devi, Madhubala, Yogeeta Bali and Leena Chandavarkar.

It was in '85 that he expressed his angst, his wish to get away from the madding crowd. He announced that he would like to retire to the tranquillity of his hometown Khandwa. But that he wouldn't was a foregone conclusion. Because the best entertainers never give up.

A man of extremes, he could either adore you or detest you. As it happened, you sampled both facets. He liked you for appreciating his **Shabash Daddy** but he couldn't accept you for saying that his **Door Wadiyon Mein Kahin** wasn't up to the mark. It was a mess of crime, love and deceit set against a snowy backdrop that left you strangely ice-cold. You had to state that, put it down in words, even a wonderman could go wrong, you said. Kishore Kumar was furious, obviously the film meant a lot to him.

He was annoyed that you hadn't really understood him; between him and you there was this sudden communication gap. He had even taken out this enormous advertisement in a film paper, slapping you as he would slap a spoilt child.

You were hurt, maybe, but that couldn't whittle your admiration for the man, the artist. You could never deny his super gift for entertainment. You saw him pump life into music, you saw him on the Shanmukhananda stage transforming the long black mike wire in o a live partner.



He would not get bulldozed.  
Kishore Kumar singing at the Congress Centenary, 1985

You watched him on the revolving platform of New York's Madison Square Gardens. You heard his voice g'hosting for every movie hero, teenager or senior. you heard him on the radio as soon as you woke up, **you** collected his records, cassettes, some video tapes. You **kept** in contact. And then he pulled another number. He **went** away.



**2.**

**THE MELODY**

## THE CRY



New Delhi

*Talking about his brother, Ashok Kumar says:*

He was not a trained singer. In fact he had a very poor voice in his childhood. One day, when he was five years old, my mother was cutting some vegetables when he blundered in. He cut himself so badly - in fact he cut a toe right off - that he cried for a month. Finally when he felt better and he stopped crying, we discovered, miraculously, that his voice had cleared. The hoarseness and the snuffle had gone.

When he came to Bombay I told him that I would try and get him roles as an actor. He wasn't terribly interested either

way. But he practiced his music, day and night. I think the talent he really had was to hit the note - unerringly, every time. He never deviated off the sargam, not even once. And then he had an almost uncanny sense of rhythm. These were the two things that made him a singer. These, and practice.

*Music historian Roshan Shahani:*

I think one of Kishore Kumar's greatest achievements was the way he was able to bring speech back into music. This was supposed to have been the central, defining aspect of classical Indian music: the way they could bring music so close to the act of speech, mould language to discover its poetry and musicality, rather than impose musical forms on verbal compositions.

By and large our film music directors after Independence - Laxmikant-Pyarelal and Kalyanji-Anandji and the rest - did of course use orchestral forms, but strictly within the limits of melody. This is not how harmony, for instance, should really be understood. Because Kishore Kumar was never afraid to play with words, and verbal rhythm, he was able to make something quite different out of these melodic scores where every instrument just parallels what other instruments play, rather than using counterpoint.

*Music director Kalyanji:*

Kishore's ability really lay in the way he was able to make dialogue from music. He was not bound by rhythm or notes. You didn't know where or when the speaking would start and the singing began. When we did stage shows together, he didn't even require to be given the sur, he would be speaking, then would just burst into song, then he would improvise, he would speak in between the song. No he didn't do *riyaz* as such. He observed. That was his *riyaz*.

## MUSIC AND THE MACHINE

### -ORCHESTRATION/ ORGANISATION

**W**hen Kishore Kumar arrived on the musical scene film music had already been through at least two major periods of transition: the first, when sound came in and music had to actually invent a soundtrack; the second - even more painfully - when the studios crumbled in the late 1940s to leave it to music directors to once again invent, through music, a genre of film which could sustain an all-India market that would go beyond both cultural and economic limitations of the regional cinema.

Sound came into Indian cinema in 1930, and only worsened an already severe problem: of the sheer antithesis between Indian music, classical and folk, on the one hand and orchestration in whatever form available on the other. Indian music survived, till then, on continuities of scale, on a rhythmic pattern bound only by its cycle, a system that freed the singer into improvisatory explorations as much as it freed the percussionist from merely keeping taal (the beat).

Music directors in the early years were generally clueless as to how to compose with precisely defined time lengths - in film, lengths specified by fractions of seconds. For this meant reworking both Indian instruments in terms of harmonic and, even more particularly, melodic patterns - which of course is not how a sitar or sarod is supposed to be played - and then, in addition, integrating Western instruments, like the piano, for instance, into a native orchestral mode.

In this section we provide some evidence on just how orchestration came to the Indian cinema after Independence, the complicated transitions of some of the most familiar instruments being used today, what orchestration itself came to mean.

*Keshavrao Bhole, music director of the Prabhat Studio and of films such as V. Shantaram's **Amritmanthan**(1934), **Duniya Na Mane** (1937) and Fathelal/Damle's **Sant Tukaram** (1936), was one of the first music directors to internalise the forms and problems of Western orchestration. He learnt a lot from watching American films, as he has written, in his book **Mazhe Sangeet - Rachana Ani Digdarshan**. We carry an excerpt:*

**Mazhe Sangeet  
-Rachana Ani  
Digdarshan**

-Mauz Prakashan,  
Bombay.  
Tr:

Ashish Rajadhyaksha

Between 1919 and 1930 I had seen several excellent silent films at the Capitol, the old West End, the Opera House. At Capitol and Opera House, the theatre had an orchestra pit in which was seated a full-scale English orchestra, which would play while the film went on, and would elaborate the emotions portrayed with its myriad combinations of tone and volume. The conductors of orchestras at these two theatres were particularly good...**Lady With The Camille, Faust, Scaramouche, Gold Rush, City Lights, The Blue Angel**, were some of the great films brought to life by these orchestras. I wasn't even aware then of the tremendous impact these orchestras were to have on me. I hadn't a clue at that time that I too would one day be making music for theatre and film. The myriad tones of instruments, their particular timbre, and how these could come together so magnificently, engaged my mind. During the interval I would move up close and stare at the instruments, sometimes listen to them - out of sheer curiosity! I was baffled by the way they played different notes (swaras) on different scales yet could actually play together, without a mistake, and without sounding flat. Those lined sheets of music before them, the way some instruments were silenced while others were introduced - and their combinations, sometimes so soft and at others so grand, evoking such sentiments! When we played or sang our music in groups, everyone would follow the same swaras, play and sing the same thing. But here everyone was different. Now I understand the system of chords (where three notes combine at the same time), sometimes in harmony, sometimes in *vivadi*. I was particularly fasci-



nated by the pianist. He would hold the rhythm with his left hand but play something quite different with his right. When I tried to play different things with my two hands on the pedal-organ, I only produced chaos. The pianist explained, later on when I met him, "We have been trained to do this from our childhood. When we sing, everyone has his own swaras. And when we play the piano, we hold the chord with our left hand and play the melody with our right, following the notes written down by the composer".

My first lesson, then, was to see how the Western musician 'read' the music before him. Our harmonium of course just follows the singer's notes, while various percussion instruments like the tabla, mridangam, jhanj, tuntuna, ektari, would keep the beat. While we emphasised the aural, they concentrated on the written score - this, I then concluded, was the basic difference. Listening to this music at that time proved useful later, leaving me with the sole regret that I didn't formally train myself within the Western musical system at that time.

The talkies came in 1929, and I saw films like **Showboat** and **My Sonny Boy** at the Capitol and the Excelsior in Bombay. As I heard Paul Robeson's magnificently powerful voice and Al Jolson's sentimental renderings, I knew that I was participating in the very first experiments being made in talkie film music. Because this music was recorded on the print itself, it had done away with the live orchestra, which is something I regret. I believe that there is substantial difference between live and recorded music and we have still to assimilate the possibilities of the latter.

Even today, in the theatre for instance, pre-recorded music falls completely short of the effect a live violinist, for instance, can provide - the very placement of the loud-speaker, in our theatres, militates against the term background music: it is right there, in front, even if it is supposed to come from somewhere in the back...

Classical music was itself hardly immune from the changes taking place. The establishment of the Gandharva Sangeet Mahavidyalaya in Gwalior at the turn of the century had heralded a new era in classical performance music, of proliferating music schools and a vast and growing audience of music lovers trained, not to sing, but to **listen** to music. Singers had long moved out of courts and into public performances by the time the Gramophone Company of India arrived in 1910 in Calcutta to capitalise on the growing musical marketplace. GCI/HMV was followed rapidly by the Hindustan Record Company and then other commercial record companies even as Rabindranath Tagore's explorations into choral and orchestral music gave rise to the first major **popular** musical form in India in this century: the Rabindra sangeet. Classical music performances became more and more compact to respond, for example, to the 78 r.p.m. disc; performers drew from, as much as they influenced, popular stage music (the natya-sangeet); by the mid '30s a form of **bhava-geet** had become a simplified and highly distilled mode of classical singing adapted especially for the recording industry and, later, for the radio. In film, the actual presence of ancillary industries such as the recording industry - and the publishing industry, which had already popularised e.g. novels like **Devdas** - provided tremendous economic sustenance to the studio system: and it accepted this support as completely as it established its own systems of cultural production with Prabhat, New Theatres, Bombay Talkie and the rest of the big studios.

The collapse of the studios coincided with the end of World War II and, later, Independence.

The S.K. Patil Film Enquiry Committee appointed by the Government of India in 1951 still most accurately chronicles the shift that occurred:

**Report Of The Film  
Enquiry Committee,  
1951,**

Ministry of Information  
& Broadcasting,

The War ended at a time when the industry was enjoying a boom. Cinemas, old and new, were earning large revenues, and since the annual production of films had been curtailed - from about 170 at the beginning of the War to about 100 when it ended, the distributors and producers also earned good returns on every film. So when controls were lifted by 1946, there was a sudden spurt of activity both in production and in exhibition. Theatre equipment imported in the two years 1946-47 amounted in value to a crore of rupees. Studio equipment costing another crore of rupees was also imported and installed in the same period. Within three months of decontrol, over 100 new producers entered the field, attracted by the prospects held out by the industry, and new films released numbered over 200 in 1946 and 283 in 1947...

Within three years of the end of the war, the leadership of the industry had changed hands from established producers to a variety of successors. Leading 'stars', exacting financiers and calculating distributors and exhibitors forged ahead. Freelancing became the rule among the artistes, and 'stars' on the payroll of established producers became the exception...Film production, a combination of art, industry and showmanship, became in substantial measure the recourse of deluded aspirants to easy riches, and neither internal correctives nor external inspiration or pressure intervened to halt the process.

What kind of **music** were these exacting financiers and distributors and producers coming up with? Dalsukh M. Pancholi's **Khazanchi** had already shown something of what was to come, with its flattened out spaces, decorative motifs interspersed with song-dance routines; earlier, Anil Biswas had sensed some of the potential, in sheer Brechtian terms, of popular music in Mehboob Khan's films, particularly **Roti** (1941). Shankar-Jaikishen, Naushad, and later O.P. Nayyar and Madan Mohan were to usher in another kind of music, another era where the very form of orchestration was to mean something else: the cohering of vastly different cultural and regional tastes into an all-India 'formula' that could go beyond language-specificity and into a market that even spilled outside India to virtually rival Hollywood in its dominance over the Middle East, Africa, and large parts of South East Asia.

*The technical challenges were awesome.*



*In 1955 Anil Biswas pointed to the urgency of the problems of orchestration:*

Film Seminar Report,  
1955,  
organised and hosted  
by the Sangeet Natak  
Akademi.  
Ed: Dr R.M. Ray,  
New Delhi 1956.

Little research has been made in the field of film music. Orchestration is yet in its infancy in India. Indian instruments have not yet been tested for all their tonal values, for purposes of orchestration. Electro-mechanisation, as a factor, is yet new to most of our musicians. Microphones and projectors have enabled us to annihilate space and time, but we have not been fully able to appreciate their qualities and adapt ourselves to their needs as yet. The marriage between music and the machine is a baffling phenomenon to comprehend, and we have not been able to master the situation to the extent required of us.

Any researches undertaken in the field of music will have to take into account this new factor of mechanisation, and musical instruments and those who handle them will have to adapt themselves to the new conditions. An exhaustive inventory of Indian musical instruments in the fields of classical and folk music will have to be prepared without delay.

*Nevertheless these composers introduced an extraordinarily wide variety of new instruments. Musicologist Bhaskar Chandavarkar reveals the extent of adaptation and the consequent cultural syncretism that new explorations in orchestration brought about, especially in the late 1940s and 50s:*



Song Of  
The Instruments  
- The Tradition Of  
Music In  
Indian Cinema

- Cinema In India,  
Apr-Jun 88, Bombay.

Singing brings into use the most basic of instruments...As vocal chords and resonators are also used for spoken language, the voice is deeply rooted in culture. A musical instrument is an external aid...(In consequence), a Hawaiian or an African instrument would be accepted in Indian music with much less intolerance than a corresponding voice from a singer...

Fifty years ago, when film music directors were looking around for new sounds and different colours for their orchestras, they welcomed musicians who played unusual instruments. Many came from unexpected quarters: some from outside Bombay, some from city hotel bands and restaurants, others from the army and from among folk artists. Yet others set out to teach themselves unusual instruments - and many became valuable contributors to the tradition of film music.

The mandolin is an instrument of Italian origin. It has a fretted finger board and four pairs of strings. Played with a plectrum, it could pass for an Eastern instrument because of its tonal colour. Three decades ago, it was very popular with our music directors, and one of the best performers on the mandolin then was Sajjad Hussein. He could get the instrument to 'sing' Indian melodies. Sajjad was also a competent composer (and I directly) helped many younger musicians to take to playing the mandolin. From Naushad to C. Ramchandra to Shankar-Jaikishan, this little Italian instrument was a favourite of arrangers...

Another instrument that film musicians borrowed from the West did not adapt so easily. The clarinet was perfected in the West around 1830. It came to India with the British via their police and military bands. At silent film shows in theatres, with wedding brass bands, the clarinet became popular. The music for the Prabhat emblem (using) a melody in Raag Bhoopali was played E-Flat on a high-pitched clarinet...Today, although the clarinet has all but vanished from film song studios, we can go back to Master



Ibrahim's 78-rpm. discs and the wonderful songs of Khursheed, Kanan Bala and Noor Jehan (and songs like) *Leke Pahela Pahela Pyar*, that all-time hit from O.P. Nayyar that used the clarinet beautifully...

One of the first songs to earn inter-cultural popularity was *Awara Hoon - Gardish Mein....* It was towards the end of the 40s that Shankar-Jaikishen introduced the instrument that was later associated with Raj Kapoor and his **Awara** songs: the piano accordion. The instrument came to India only after the First World War. Its sound is more aggressive than a conventional hand-operated harmonium. Large instruments also had buttons that could change the tone-colour from three to six different ways. Before electrical/electronic organs came to India, the accordion was a very popular instrument in film songs. C. Ramchandra, Shankar-Jaikishen, S.D. Burman, O.P. Nayyar and many others used it - *Roop Tera Mastana* and *Mere Sapnon Ki Rani* both sung by Kishore Kumar are but two of the great hits of the recent past. Goody Seervai, they say, was the pioneer of this instrument. He gave it currency and popularity. However, as the instrument was so much like the good old harmonium, many musicians shifted from the harmonium to the accordion and several of them were sought after at recording sessions.

Clavier, or Klavier, is a word for keyboard in German. So when an instrument that had a keyboard but sounded like a violin was invented, they named it the claviolein. Subsequent generations of this early ancestor have given us synthesisers where the valves were replaced first by transistors and then by chips. An early model was brought to Bombay's film studios by a youth named Kalyanji Veerji Shah. He reportedly played it for the **Nagin** songs. It simulated the sound of a snake-charmer's been. *Tan Dole Mera Man Dole* and *OOnchi Duniyake Deewari* were hits of the period. And **Nagin** will be ever remembered for Hemant Kumar's music and the synthesiser or claviolein sound he used.

In many ways these instruments were the forerunners of a new sound vocabulary that audiences would accept in later years. Kalyanji Shah went on to team up with his brother Anandji, and the team is still a big commercial draw.

The family of drums and percussion instruments is the most varied in the film song orchestra. (Although) we have a large number of all kinds and sizes of drums in India, it was...natural that music directors started looking beyond the tabla and mridangam - the two most common concert rhythm instruments. The jazz drum set, or trap drums, were brought into films early on - we were introduced to them in India at clubs and hotel dances. They combined well with some percussion instruments from Latin America...Some years ago, bongo drums were very popular. And others Afr Caribbean in origin: castanets, resoreso, kabas, Chinese blocks, rattles, bells, marakass - and anything else that could produce a musically useful sound when hit by something else. These instruments are now familiar sounds to us, thanks to the percussion or 'rhythm specialists' of the film industry. O.P. Nayyar, S.D. Burman, Shankar-Jaikishen, Kalyanji-Anandji, Laxmikant-Pyarelal, R.D. Burman - all these music directors have sought very special effects from their rhythm sections, using non-Indian instruments and blending them into our own taal.

K.K. and Lata Mangeshkar with Laxmikant-Pyarelal



*Mani Kaul says about Kishore Kumar:*

He seemed to have the freedom to move almost anywhere he liked. He had both the emotional and musical disposition to make a song, let's say, of table and chair and bottle and sky, a sort of musical Rene Magritte. His yodelling is extraordinary, I don't even know where he could have got it from, but it showed how he could so easily slip into and outside the given beat. I believe he sang the Malthusian theory of population as it was, once.

*And Kamal Swaroop:*

I think what happened was that he could move from the musical to the spoken via the image. If you say, as you quote Kalyanji-Anandji on him, that observation was his *riyaz*, what it means is his ability to mime. That is, to convert the music through whatever he sees in it into a mode of speaking singing.

*Rajat Dholakia was the music director of Kamal Swaroop's **Om Dar-b-dar** made last year, and is therefore the man responsible for one of the most exciting soundtracks in the Indian cinema for quite some years. He is extremely fascinated by some of the less-than-obvious achievements of popular, even mass-consumption music (e.g. Michael Jackson, whom he has used remarkably in **Om Dar-b-dar**), and speaks of Kishore Kumar here:*

Kishore Kumar was our first real synthetic singer. By this I ofcourse equate him not just with the synthesising that took place in his music, but the **synthesiser**, whose age he embodied.

This synthesiser had a peculiar coming - preceded by the klaviolin, it was initially just a series of simple short circuitings, like the kind of sound you'd get if you just touched the input and output wires of a speaker. Kalyanji used it for **Nagin** and made it sound like a snake charmer's pungi. But of course it was a completely defined series of notes. On the other hand, the Hawaiian guitar was also a sound-effects instrument because it was so close to the speaking voice. It had the advantage of microtones, because it was not fretted. They say that Sajjad Hussein was very important in finding new uses for many of these instruments, and **Rustom Sohrab** were the first efforts at assimilating Western musical influences. There were also Christian arrangers, like Sebastian, who were able to explain new kinds of orchestration to music directors like Naushad.

Now, in singing, a singer like Saigal was evidently a classical-influenced singer - he used classical meend and gamak, and it was an extension of earlier thumris. In fact Kishore Kumar initially tried imitating Saigal, and certainly Mukesh did. But it is evident that the singers who followed had to find new personal equations with their music - something that could equate Saigal's sheer commitment, but in a different way, in a way that would include the instruments, the direct impact that pop music had on the audience. Mohammed Rafi found his equation through folk music, Punjabi folk, Fakiri music, which he must have heard. His was a gift, but a 'pure' gift - unlike Kishore whose giftedness was entirely synthetic. I mean, to make it graphic, Rafi must have learnt through what he saw and heard, moulded himself to that, but Kishore Kumar learnt through playing with toys. The quality of *ashcharya* was itself different. Like the molecules and waves of radio

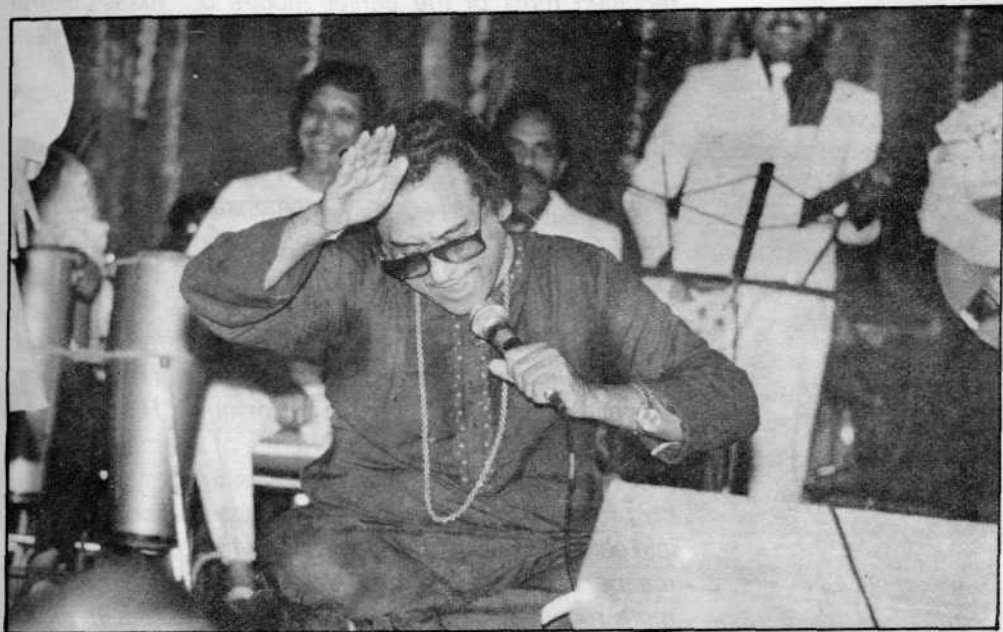
replacing the wandering Fakir. Mukesh was a failure, and he must have known it - Saigal worked on swar-bhav and taan vistaar, but his pain came from somewhere else, while Mukesh worked purely on the appeal of such music. His learning came from listening to Saigal, or so it would seem. Now if such singing is a divine gift, Saigal was aware of the religious connotations, but Mukesh must have known that he wasn't achieving something, so he used emotion as a sort of additional factor. He was extremely self-conscious of the appeal that such music would have, but it is perhaps inherent to the kind of music he was singing that he not be self-conscious. Something like that.

But the way Kishore worked this through is most interesting. I think that the impact his films had on me as a child has not changed even today - I saw this song with him and Madhubala on Chhaya Geet a few days ago, and it was exactly what it was years back. Now the childlike emotion has a purity about it, classical and pop music and all that comes later. And he must have instinctively hated the taan, so he replaced it with a la-la-la-la, and it sounded better. It actually sounds better. But in that shift he was able to straddle a world.

And it includes not just humming wires and sound effects, but brass, and the bongo - some time while having a bath he must have tried a Ru-pa-pa or a bum-chick and found yet another toy to play with. He had to mediate his childhood through his giftedness, otherwise he'd have not worked. Children look at the future, the day they will grow up. Adults are the ones who keep saying, 'When I was a child I used to...'.  
to...



# THE YODEL



*Kishore Kumar was central to the technological transition from an earlier to newer mode of orchestration. The shift was self-evidently that of a new mass-culture demanding to burst forth from its confines of the popular, that is from confines that had their own nationalist overtones before Independence, but which now had to cater to the technical, cultural and aesthetic demands of a new audience. An audience that filled the rapidly expanding urban metropolises, which could not speak for itself, or of itself either as in any sense rooted to a geographically defined region, or as being an urban proletariat.*

*That new carriers of mass-communications had to be invented to cater to this audience had already been indicated in the post-War boom, when large-scale commodity*



production had established its indigenous bases. The cinema, simultaneously a decentralised industrial sector, and yet the fifth largest 'industry' in the country, had replaced most of the earlier modes of mass-cultural dissemination: it was, by 1955, **the** definitional element of social congregation and the marketplace.

And then came the radio.

The radio, above all perhaps, demonstrates the extent of sheer cultural **invention** that defines the mass-art of the 1950s.

The first man to give it any policy-directions after Independence, the Information & Broadcasting Minister B.V. Keskar, was himself implacably hostile to film music. His emphasis on classical music is considered one of the main reasons for its revival in modern India, and was, in itself, a remarkably progressive decision. The later capitulation, however, into commercialism, and the reason why it took place in the manner and at the time it did, is perhaps revealed by a much more recent statement made by P.C. Chatterjee, former Director General of All India Radio:

**Broadcasting In  
India,**

P.C. Chatterjee

Sage Publications,  
New Delhi, 1977. Pg 36

The Indian film has developed its own brand of music. It is known as film music and consists of sentimental songs, sometimes bordering on the vulgar. The music is a hybrid of Indian and Western elements, where the singer is supported by what is known as an 'orchestra' - a couple of dozen instruments, strings, wind and percussion, Indian and Western. The harmonizations which precede and intersperse the stanzas of the lyric, bear little relation to the melody. Film music is extremely popular and is affecting the character of all forms of light and folk music in the country. Responsible critics believe that film music is one of the prime factors in corrupting taste. Dr Keskar, who was Minister of Information and Broadcasting for nearly a decade beginning 1951, virtually banned the broadcast of film music on the ground that it is vulgar in form

and content. But this policy had to be modified because it cost the broadcasting organisation too much in popularity.

Such cultural backwardness was hardly equipped to keep the rising demands being made by the growing marketplace at bay. In early 1953, Radio Ceylon started its commercial service that beamed Indian film-music based programmes directly to India, and for six years held an extraordinary monopoly over Indian airwaves. Every Wednesday evening, thousands of Indian transistors would tune into the **Binaca Geet Mala** as it played the week's hit parade.

Nearly all of Kishore Kumar's own favourites, **Dukhi Man Mere** from **Funtoosh**, **Koi Hamdam Na Raha** in his own **Jhumroo**, and dozens of others - **Meri Lottery**, the famed retaliation for the harassment he received from income tax officers, **Jai Govindam Jai Gopalam** - have been introduced to us via Radio Ceylon and this particular programme. It was in 1958 that the All India Radio, belatedly realising all the revenue they were losing, to say nothing of the drop in popular music listenership, started a commercial channel themselves, the **Vividh Bharati**.

And it was by no means accidental, even though ironic, to see in retrospect how, two decades later, it was the radio that was used as a bargaining counter to get Kishore Kumar to toe the government line during the Emergency in 1975. The Emergency was the final culmination of a process of cultural and economic lumpenisation that had started a long time previously: precisely with the efforts to yoke political propaganda to mass-culture. It is not only ironic that the radio should have tried to ban, as obscene, one of its own creations and greatest icons, it is an encapsulation of those two crucial decades from 1955 to 1975.

**The Business of  
Kishore Kumar**  
- Amit Tyagi

(This is a piece of speculation - about how the genius of Kishore Kumar reached out, survived and flourished in the midst of the 'industry' and 'business' of cinema. 'Industry' and 'business' are in quotes precisely because they invoke images that are normally considered antithetical to 'genius', 'talent' - the words repeatedly used to describe Kishore Kumar. It is based on conversations with film directors, music industry sources and film traders-distributors, exhibitors and financiers).

Cinema is generally accepted today as an art form. Equally accepted is the notion of the artist's struggle to develop his vision and talent in the course of working in the cinema. When Kishore Kumar began his career in the late '40s, in

**The Business**



Kishore Kumar

Bombay, such notions were alien to him. He came from Khandwa, not quite sure of what he wanted to be, perhaps with notions of himself as a K.L. Saigal-like singing star. He had come to Bombay, not to follow some profession or practice his art but, really, to 'seek his fortune': the only reality he had was that of the star firmament of the popular cinema, and he wished to belong to that. This is a key notion, because it differentiates him, for instance, from e.g. Satyajit Ray, whom he knew, but who followed a completely different notion of cinema. The other part of this is to see how glamour, money, the sheer aura of recognition that the popular Hindi cinema in India generates as being more than just addictive to an artist like Kishore Kumar - his unselfconsciousness and instinctive drives needed the throbbing on the hearts of an appreciative audience to survive, to rise to greater heights. This notion defines even Kishore Kumar's own sense of his work and its worth.

For most people today he is identified with his voice, the prodigious talents he brought to work in his singing. He began as a singer fairly early, around the same time as Mohammed Rafi, Lata Mangeshkar and Mukesh, but it took him longer to reach the top. Music industry sources confirm that his coming to the top could have happened at any point in Kishore Kumar's career but he chose not to; and when he did, the rank was his within a few years. Anyone looking at his sheer versatility can equally argue that, had he chosen to, he could have been a comedy star, a top ranking commercial filmmaker or even a music director. Why then did he concentrate his energies on playback singing? What was the business side of this decision? What was the regret - the fact that even in his days of singing superstardom he made **Badhti Ka Naam Daadhi**, the only pure comedy of his entire career?

His first recognition was as a singer - quite distinctive with his freewheeling style. But he became famous as an actor/star, a lead-role star as distinct from a mere 'actor' (the term is used for non-lead role players in Bombay film). He had

the capacities to handle comedy, but not e.g. Shammii Kapoor's looks; he had to depend on his singing, his ability at mime, his natural dancing ability. He gradually edged into a position where he not only helped, but often took over from directors with whom he was working, devising his own gags; his films were more distinctively his than those of his directors. Sometimes the narrative intention runs even counter to the performance - look at **Baap Re Baap** where he is functioning in consistent opposition to the rather straightforward storyline. Som times this was re-sented, one of his producers even got a court order to get him to follow the director's orders on the set.

But the films were successful, and did build a cult following for the man which has remained intact. On the other hand, however, the films he made were never more than B-grade, in the strictly economic sense, which meant that he had to function to the requirements of the genres within which he worked; he had to play the romantic lead; he had to suffer from the fact that the so-called A-grade films were more 'serious'stuff. And he had

to aspire for that too. The point is he was building a space within which he could act, for which he had little precedent-for him personally, it was the 'guy from Mandwa', 'Ashok Kumar's brother', a guy acting basically to make money and return. If **Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi** was the zenith of his collective past, with both brothers acting in the film along with him, we also see his comic sense perfectly counterpointed with Ashok Kumar's stiff upper lip bunglings and Anoop Kumar's Woody Allen style nervousness. There is Madhubala, then the pinnacle of beauty and sophistication in the Hindi cinema playing her upper-class role as opposed to Kishore Kumar's 'ordinary man'. Until the coming of video, this was the film that I predictably, defined him for later generations as actor-singer.

The problems came up after the success of **Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi**. Until then a 'fun' actor, he now looked for big-time success. As the world opened out, he had the



standard option that the commercial industry offered him, to repeat his success, to find in it a formula. Evidently desiring stardom, as much as anyone else, this success however pushed him to greater heights, to try newer things rather than merely repeating himself. He became his own filmmaker, music director and story writer, in addition to producing and partnering the production. For him the transition was to be more dangerous than for most others - he functioned predominantly through anarchic form and mime, rather than through social satire. These films flopped, or barely broke even - some of them are virtually untraceable today, the classic signs of commercial failure. Those that are available show pretentious social concern, a no longer young star betraying an unfit body, working - exceptionally - mainly through their songs.

#### Badhti Ka Naam Daadhi





And so he concentrated on what he knew best - a breathtakingly beautiful sense of melody, and rhythm, finding in these the distant hums of the past (look at the way he uses the *Thandi Hawa Yeh Chandni Suhani* in **Jhumroo**, as first his memory, then signifying his mother's - Lalita Pawar's - tragic past, then again as Madhubala's memory, her sense of imprisonment in her house versus the freedom of the 'tribals'). **Door Gagan Ki Chaon Mein**, on the other hand, was what the New Indian Cinema would have perhaps described as a 'good film', except that, in an age before television and video, a film like that had to succeed purely on its commercial takings. This film is lyrical par excellence, a distinct leap from his earlier anarchy, but its failure also meant for him that the old comedy routine was being resisted its new areas of operation.

It was, they say, a tough time for him - he was not a star any longer, slipping from top billing to comedy side roles (**Padosan** is the most famous film of this period), worse, his comedy was too attractive, taking away the attention from the heroes, and had to be treated with caution: meaning kept as far away as possible. Doing playback for Dev Anand and S.D. Burman earlier, this was the time when he had to 'do the rounds' and declare himself available. This was also the time when tales of mysterious behaviour abounded, his unreliability asserted. This changed only when the film industry's ideas of commercial success changed, and the combine that was responsible were Rajesh Khanna and his playback voice, Kishore Kumar. They decimated all opposition through nearly a dozen consecutive silver jubilee hits; but the difference now was that as the Rajesh Khanna phenomenon rolled back, Kishore Kumar stayed where he was, now the superstar of playback singing.

And he now expanded this status into different arenas - the stage, with his big-time 'Kishore Kumar Nites' usually along with Kalyanji-Anandji. The first real superstar of music, he remained a small-time filmmaker, directing an outright comedy mainly because he wished to keep an earlier

commitment to the comic alive within him. When he died, he'd left a film incomplete - **Mamta Ki Chaon Mein**, in which he was not to act. Perhaps this might have been his resurrection as director too, for reports had it that it was in a sense similar to his earlier **Door Gagan Ki Chaon Mein**. The word most often used to describe him is genius. When the film industry uses such words, or words like talent, what they usually mean is that the person had the capacity to function within an industrial set-up but does not understand the ground rules of the game. The point is of course that the industry needs such people, like Hollywood needed 'geniuses' like Orson Welles and Josef von Stroheim. But then the industry also channelises them into relatively 'safe' areas: Stroheim and Welles into acting, Kishore Kumar into playback.

#### Jhumroo





**3.**

## **THE PERFORMANCE**

# THE PAGEANT



Bhagambhag



Karodpati

*Kishore Kumar:*

Filmfare, Sept 28, 1956.

You know, I'm going to make a 16 mm reel which I'll show to all the producers who come to sign me up. The moment they start saying, "It's a terrific role" and all that hokum, I'll say, "Just keep quiet about your role and see this." Then I'll show them the reel. "Now this", I'll say as it starts, "is my ten thousand rupee acting. This is my fifteen. This is twenty. This is fifty, and so on, until I reach a lakh. (During this time he begins by imitating himself and, as the price goes up, imitates other highly paid actors including his brother.) "Take your pick, pay the money, and go. There will be no talk of roles here"

New Delhi



Looko-Choori



*The early 1950s had already seen a basic fragmentation of the major film genres of the pre-independence era, a fragmentation that had accompanied the closure of the big studios. In Hollywood, the decline of the movie moguls had transferred control of the studios to the stock exchange, the banks and the boards that now took collective decisions based on market surveys.*

*In India, as in the Philippines and other Asian countries that also have large-scale film output, the shift was into the hands of 'independents' - commercial producers/financiers who made their money elsewhere and invested it into the film business solely with the hope of making quick returns.*

*This was, on the whole, a disastrous shift, whose consequences were only evident a couple of decades later; but the apprehensions, even from practitioners of cinema in the mid-50s, have been extensively recorded (as e.g. in the Patil Report, the Sangeet Natak Akademi's Film Seminar of 1955, and the film industry's own occasional publications, such as the Silver Jubilee Souvenir of the birth of the talkie in India, edited by B.K. Adarsh in which most of the big names contributed brief essays).*

*The apprehensions were, generally, whether we would be able to sustain the 'great heritage' of our classical civilisations, which had just been re-presented to us with Independence and the Nehru era's cultural initiative towards building new institutions.*

*But the tussle also recorded an equally strong effort to articulate a new ideology of mass-culture.*

*The best-known statement for that latter to have then emerged was from the purveyor of some of the biggest 'spectaculars' Indian cinema has ever seen: S.S. Vasan, of the Gemini Studios, Magas and maker of **Chandralekha**, and his statement, **Pageants For Our Peasants**, published in 1956.*



## Pageants For Our Peasants

- S.S. Vasan,  
Indian Talkie 1931-56,  
Silver Jubilee Souvenir,  
pg 26.

The cinema can be used both as a means to an end and, in some cases, as an end in itself. Most of us are only familiar with its employment as a means to an end - as a medium for the communication of ideas, information and knowledge. That is why perhaps it has come under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. That is to say, only one aspect of the cinema has come to be officially recognised. But, as I said, it has another, and perhaps much more important aspect, namely, as an end in itself, and it is the importance of this latter aspect that is coming to be more and more recognised and emphasised by enlightened public opinion. I will explain what I mean.

A simple story, for instance, can be orally narrated by one person to another. In this case the language employed will be casual and colloquial, and eked out with a lot of gestures, gesticulations and variations in the pitch of the voice. If the same story were, however, to be printed, then the style and the language of the narration will necessarily have to be different. The language will have to be more formal and grammatical: otherwise the sense will not be easily understood. But the purpose of the narration, either oral or written, is the same, namely to cover the plot of the story effectively. The same story can also be presented either as a poem or enacted as a drama on the stage. In these two cases the emphasis is not on the content of the story but on its presentation, as a poem or as a drama. In other words, the emphasis is not on the plot of the story but on the art of its presentation. Supposing the same story is projected on the screen, what is the purpose of such presentation? Is it to show the artistic possibilities of the screen or is it to serve merely as another means of conveying the plot of the story? I should say that the latter is the objective in most cases.

Take, for instance, the story of **The Count of Monte Christo** - why should it be made into a picture at all when it can be read as a book? Obviously because there are millions of people who would like to know the story but do not know how to read or do not have the patience to read.

But there is another class of people who might have read the story but would also like to see it as a picture. That is because any story becomes much more interesting and lively when viewed as a moving picture than when it is merely read. If the superiority of the moving picture over the printed page stops short with its own inherent superiority, as a medium, the credit for that achievement cannot legitimately go to the picture producer. He can be called an artist only to the extent that he has been able to exploit this innate superiority and improve upon it by his own artistic ingenuity. It is only in this sense that a motion picture can be said to be a work of art. It is presumably this aspect of the motion picture, as a fine art, that has attracted the patronage of our Ministry of Education, through the Sangeet Natak Akademi.

It is the lack of appreciation of this dual role of the cinema that is at the base of all unsympathetic criticism directed against the so-called 'unprogressive' quality and content of Indian motion pictures. Any number of varied and different subjects can be presented through the screen. But it is only a responsible cinema producer who can be expected to know, and does know by experience, the exact type of picture to be produced at a particular time. He knows, for instance, that the cinema, for the average citizen, is a source of composite entertainment. If the elements of a successful picture are analysed, we find that its attraction lies not merely in its story, nor solely in its songs, though one particular aspect of entertainment might have been given more prominence than another. In **Tansen**, the chief attraction was music, and in **Jhanak Jhanak**, the classical dances. In my own films, **Avvaiyar** and **Chandralekha** for instance, gorgeous spectacles were the chief attractions.

Kishore Kumar was certainly part of the pageantry. The cinema of the coherent narrative had broken down, and each of the bits had been grabbed by the various side industries it had spawned - from investments into technology and the real estate of studio space, to the big-dimension star system, to a new iconography of the fashionable and new modes of representation that affected every art form from painting to theatre and literature. The music industry alone, with radio and records and live shows, had seeped into the very innards of the celebratory: of Ganapati festivals and blaring loudspeakers for all occasions festive.

To cohere this again into the making of a film, the **attractions** of the cinema, meant that every bit of the narrative had to be reworked - the way films were seen was now different, the way they were made had to reintegrate the disparities of the industry. The story-line was skeletal, even incidental, as action was foregrounded. The actor was the medium, he had to offer **his** persona as the only given continuity from shot to shot, as the bits were picked up and now embodied in the image of the star.

The actor, and his music.

#### Bimal Roy's *Naukri*



# NOSTALGIA AND THE FUTURE

*Hrishikesh Mukherjee says:*

He was a born genius, and as a result, unpredictable. I took him for my very first film, **Musafir**. One realised very quickly that he couldn't really be controlled, that he wouldn't stick to the script. You could either force him to do what you wanted, in which case you simply got a bad performance, or you could interact with his abilities, even to the extent of improvising.

On the last day of shooting **Musafir**, I was waiting for him, all my crew were waiting and he wasn't turning up. I rang his house, and his wife said, just come over and see what's happened. I thought he was ill or something, so I went. Inside, he started shouting, 'Mat aiye, mat aiye'. When I went in, what did I see? He had shaved off all his hair.

He had just returned from shooting a film with Prasad, **Miss Mary**, and he had an argument with them and shaved off his head in protest. They forced him to act, wearing a hat. And I got my make-up man to fashion a kind of wig for him, and some of the shots I've used have him in a wig.

Acting in the Hindi film had already changed by the time Kishore Kumar arrived, a callow youth from Khandwa.

Elder brother Ashok Kumar, with his Bombay Talkie films, Dilip Kumar, Balraj Sahani and Raj Kapoor had, each in their distinctive ways, assimilated the new modes of storytelling through their personae: they had a 'style', and consequently a kind of mise-en-scene, all their own.

Ashok Kumar, a protégé of Himansu Rai and a product of Bombay Talkie, was among those who featured in the vanguard - Bombay Talkie was crucial to determine the forms that the later 'All India' Hindi cinema followed, the star configurations with but thinly veiled socially 'realist' themes - Rai, trained in a cultural packaging of films through his successful export of oriental exotica in the silent era - *Light Of Asia*, *A Throw Of Dice*, *Shiraz* and others - had both the understanding and distribution-oriented infrastructure to predict the Hindi cinema that followed long before e.g. New Theatres could, and Ashok Kumar was his production controller.

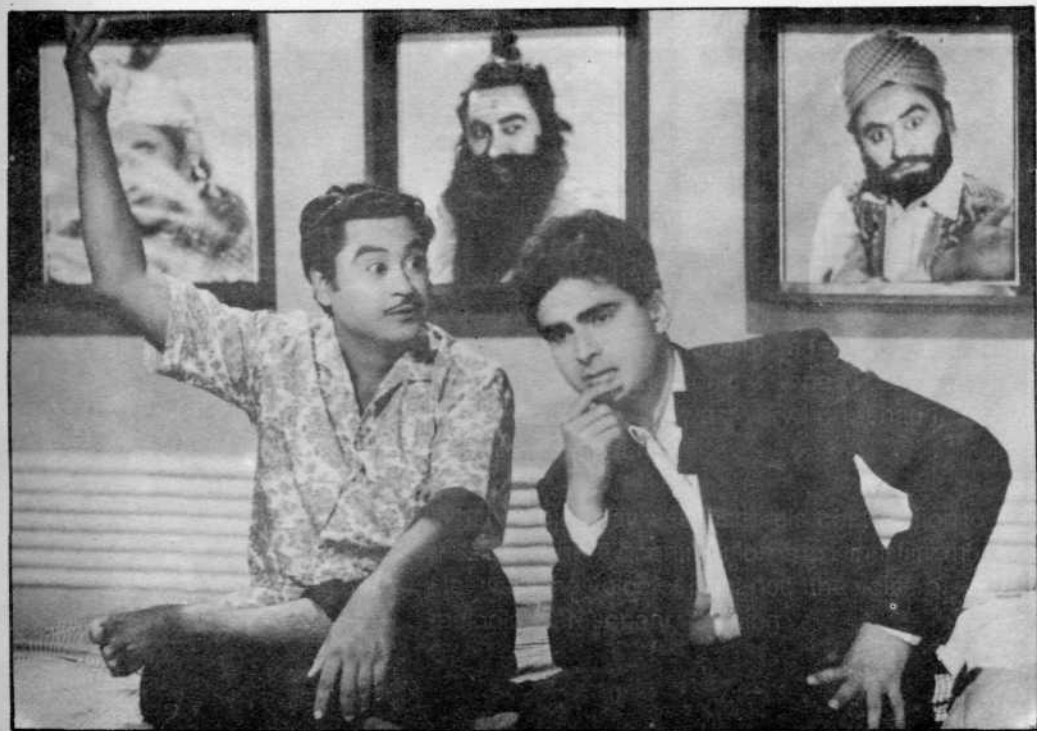
For actors after Independence, the shift meant contending with other things - Balraj Sahani and, to a certain extent Dilip Kumar, for instance interpreted these modes into a naturalist, 'method' style: *Kabuliwallah* and *Dharti Ke Lal* and *Deedar* among others. But Raj Kapoor reconfigured the narrative through the crucial additives of a familiar singing voice associating with certain singers, and certain kinds of songs that were inescapably theirs, and so his (Raj Kapoor always came with the Shankar-Jaikishan and Mukesh combine, for instance. And it is interesting to see the role that K.A. Abbas, very much a socialist-realist, anti-music filmmaker, played in giving Raj Kapoor his persona, or his repeated references to e.g. De Sica's influence on him).

Kishore Kumar's ingredients were quite fundamentally different: what they had was an extraordinary **absence**



of nostalgia. He was perhaps the only actor to possess such a quality in his time. In the days of **Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi**, **Half Ticket**, **Jhumroo** and **Baap Re Baap** he was his own everything: an all inclusive ensemble of actor, singer, music director and gag-writer. Remarkably free of moorings, he did not carry the guilt of history in his exchanges. He **was** the generation of his time, the impersonator and then carrier of ebullient hope for the future rather than regret for a lost home.

From role to role - Karodpati





*Comment from: an anonymous Kishore Kumar fan.*

On the first of every month, Radio Ceylon would broadcast one song in the morning - and it was Kishore Kumar's famous **Aaj Paheli Tareekh Hai Yeh Paheli Tareekh Hai**. And, you knew it was the first of the month, you knew it was payday, you knew you could perhaps get drunk tonight. You weren't cynical about **Rahene Ko Ghar Nahin Hai Sara Jahan Hamara**. You simply hoped for the best.

*Director H.S. Rawail, who made two films, **Shararat** and **Lehren** with Kishore Kumar:*

*Sharara:*





Shararat



Shararat

He was a comedian.

*Of what kind?*

*Ulti seedhi baatein karta rehta tha.* He was obviously overworked, like most actors are, but he didn't really have their ego. I remember when I was making **Shararat** he didn't have the time to sing a song that would be picturised on him. I went to his house and they said he wasn't in. But I laid in wait for him on the road, and when his car came by, I said I wouldn't let him go until he gave me a date for a recording. He was genuinely busy, and I'm going to take Mohammed Rafi to playback for him. He didn't mind, said it was okay. That was the difference - a star would not have the time, but would always find any other solution. *Laparvaahi tha.* He never seemed to fight with life, he either found a simple alternative or simply backed out.

*What was his comedy style like? Is it true that he improvised on the set?*

He didn't do anything that a director didn't want him to do. Film is a director's medium, and the only person a director will allow on that terrain is the story writer. But he was a comic par excellence. The best we've had. He had that musicality bred into his very marrow. So he could dance, he had that fantastic flair for gesture.

You could see the rapidity with which his personae changed, as he moved fluidly in and out of a role: the sherpa mountaineer in **Jhumroo**, the child and the madman in **Half Ticket**, the many and myriad disguises in **Baap Re Baap** culminating in surely the weirdest and most extraordinary impersonation of a woman, the seduction sequence at the end of **Baap Re Baap** when he sings to Asha Bhosle's playback.

He borrowed at will as he sustained films with the thinnest of plots purveyed with his control over gesture. These plots took on surreal dimensions as they were pushed way beyond their conventional lengths, pushed through the romantic and into a space where he could turn the story around to whichever direction he liked, and give the plot the capacity to absorb it. The influences came from Danny Kaye and from Jerry Lewis, from the **tamasha** and the **nautanki** - recall the song with Helen and Pran in **Half Ticket**, **Woh Ek Nazar To Kya Mili** in which **nautanki** combines with whatever they understood then of Russian folk dance, or the copying of the **Tequila** theme in a tribal dance in **Jhumroo**. The song **Ma Ma Ma Marega**.

About Frank Tashlin, director of Jerry Lewis' films, Paul Willemen says what is essentially true of Kishore Kumar's work too:

Tashlin's Method  
- A Hypothesis,  
Paul Willemen,

in Willemen/  
Claire Johnstone  
ed: Frank Tashlin,  
Edinburgh Film  
Festival,

A Tashlin film does not profess to be a single work, unique or entirely closed in upon itself, standing as a completely self-sufficient or 'organic' whole. (recall Kishore Kumar's consistent references of one film in another - the yodelling theme of **Jhumroo** in **Baap Re Baap** or the autobiographical references in **Half Ticket**, **Door Gagan Ki Chaon Mein** or **Shabash Daddy**). Rather, his films present themselves as comprising part of a network of visual texts produced in a particular society in a particular time...

many people (recall, once again, the sequence in *Badhti Ka Naam Daadhi* in which Kishore Kumar announces that as director, he is like god, and since the costumes have not arrived on time it has been decreed that the next sequence shall be played without them - Ed). Moreover, apart from demystifying the production process, Tashlin incorporates into his film various examples of film consumption, thus inscribing into his films the entire itinerary of the art product, from the first idea and/or basic constraints up to the viewing of the finished product...

In fact, it would appear that the elements are chosen with a view to their combinatory potential, or, to put it the other way around, the fact that the basic procedure of a Tashlin film involves combination (addition, subtraction, multiplication, juxtaposition) determines the nature of the elements which can function in such a context. This determines, for one thing, the nature of the gags in Tashlin films...The intricate network of quotes, parodies, pastiches, satires serves to embed one text into another and constitutes one level. Another consists of the exploitation of the standard and given forms of combinations in all film texts, such as sound and image (noise, music and speech plus image).

Actor Shammi Kapoor, the other freewheeling star of the 60s and who must have undoubtedly been liberated by Kishore Kumar's acting precedent, recently spoke about his own style, in a television interview with Nasreen Kabir (Channel 4's *Movie Mahal*). Asked about how he could maintain his crazy rhythms, he said, "I used to try all these beats, half and then quarter and then one-eighth and others all my own. And when I came to the end of the rhythmic cycle I would simply exit from the frame, so the director had to cut". And about the song, *Tareef Karoon Kya Uski* in the film *Kashmir Ki Kali*, he said that when Mohammed Rafi had to sing it he was worried about too many refrains that repeated the first line. "I showed Rafi-saab how I was

going to sing the song, and I said that in my gestures, I would find a different way of singing the first line every time it came. And I told him to sing it the same way too".

*(The above quotations are from memory - Ed).*

The first ellipse of visual came when Kishore Kumar agreed to do playback - for the star that now came to embody his voice: Dev Anand. Like Rafi singing to Shammi Kapoor's gestures, and Mukesh encapsulating a style that was to be Raj Kapoor, Kishore Kumar was to not only comprehend, but provide the nuances to Dev Anand's acting. If, as Kalyanji points out, you didn't know in Kishore Kumar's singing when the song left and the dialogue started, you also found it occasionally difficult to see where the actor left off and the playback singer took over.

*Dev Anand :*

I have a very vivid and clear picture of a young boy in kurta pyjama, a funster, moving around on the premises of Bombay Talkies. I was acting in a film called **Ziddi** being produced by his brother Ashok Kumar. He used to come there sing, make us laugh. It was great to have him around. He then prevailed on his brother to let him sing a song. On screen, I sang the first song in Kishore's voice, a ghazal - *Marne ki duaen kyon maangoon*.

We got to know each other well and became friends. We used to confide in each other. Then he got a break as an actor, but he continued to sing for me. He didn't sing for anyone else till much later. Dev Anand and Kishore Kumar was a good combination. I used to tell him what mannerisms I would use for a particular song on screen and he sang keeping that in mind. Since he was an actor himself, he could enact a song. We complemented each other, I think. We built up a tremendous rapport and if I ever used someone else to sing for me, subconsciously, inwardly, he would resent it.



Then he got married to Ruma. Not many people know that she worked with me in **Afsar** as a second lead. Whenever he had problems in his marriage he used to confide in me. We travelled together by train--neither of us were very big stars till then - chatted and laughed a lot. He was always a bit eccentric and never got really close to anyone in the industry, that's why I was very flattered when I visited him at home once and found my photograph in his bedroom. We shared a very close affinity even though for a while we lost touch. He went his way and I mine, but we came together again after a while.

I would like to complement him as a singer. The resonance that he attained in his voice when he was properly rehearsed was unattainable by any other singer. When he sang with emotion, he was unbeatable. He was not a trained singer. He never improvised, he only sang what he had rehearsed. Once he was thoroughly rehearsed, he could do several retakes but they would all be the same. Sometimes he even went out of tune but he worked very hard on his songs. He trained himself and when he was prepared he was tremendous. All the comedy songs he sang for me, he used to come to my office for rehearsals with S.D. Burman. Nobody knows that.

People said he was erratic, temperamental and moody, which he was once in a while. But nobody bothered to find out why. I analysed his moods and found that when he was not ready to sing a song, he would disappear, just vanish, go underground, nobody could trace him. He would come for the recording only when he was ready. That was because he was not a trained singer and a difficult song made him nervous. Unless he was absolutely sure of himself, he wouldn't turn up for the recording. He didn't bother that the producer was losing money, or that the music director and musicians were waiting. He just didn't show up if he didn't want to. I have also found myself in situations when I wanted to curse him, but I could find the reason behind his behaviour.



He was a very fine comic a good actor, a great entertainer, but his great complex was to do serious roles, to be known as a good serious, emotional actor. In all films that he made himself, he gave himself serious roles. He was conscious enough of his popularity to go away when he found himself losing it.

He made a comeback later as a singer. I loved his voice. When I sang on screen in somebody else's voice, people missed him. Except for a few ghazals that Rafi sang for me, Kishore sang all my romantic songs. His voice was associated with my presence on screen and vice versa. I remember, one of the last songs he sang was *Yeh hawayen* for my film **Sachhe Ka Bol Bala**. He ran away after that. A few days later, he said to me, "evbhai, let's do a concert together. Let's do it before it is too late". Four-five days later he died. He was too young, he went away too early.

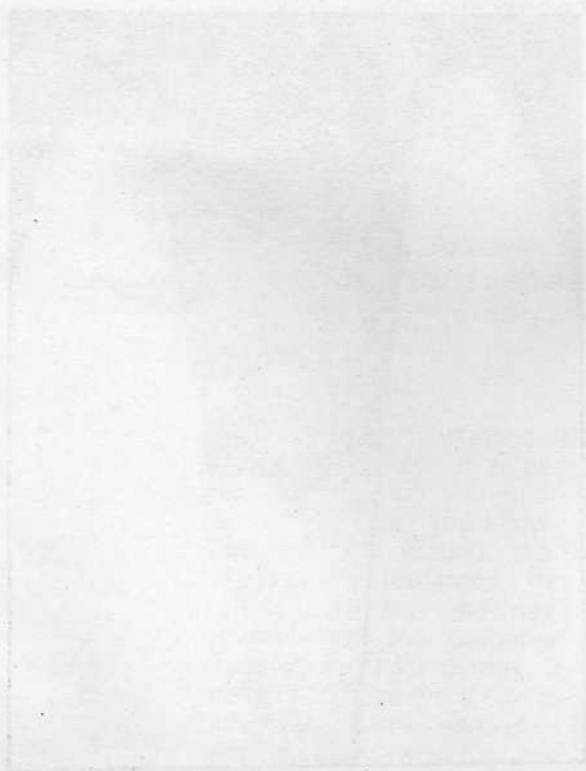
I was one of the first to reach his house when I heard the news. He looked like he was sleeping.

Whenever he had met me, he was always shouting. Very boisterous and high spirited. Like most artistes, very childlike. He always gave me a feel of the good old days. He felt he had a claim on me. When I couldn't go to his son Sumit's birthday, he was very hurt. I had to compensate with a sweet letter.

What would I say was Kishore's contribution to Hindi film music? Kishore's contribution is to Hindi film music, period. He was the voice of romance, the voice of love. Deep, melodious, resonant, fetching.

# **4.**

## **THE STATEMENT**



# I'M CAUGHT IN A VICIOUS CYCLE OF MY OWN MAKING

*In 1956, Kishore Kumar wrote a wierd, hallucinatory dialogue with his own alter-ego. We reproduce a pizantasy discussion between Kishore Kumar, the star, and Kishore Ganguly, the still young lad from Mandwa, the place he came from and to which he, towards the end of his life, repeatedly threatened to retire and return.*

In 1955



**Self Portrait**  
**- Kishore Kumar**

Timefare,  
September 28, 1995,

The Time: Nearly one-thirty at night .

The Place : A suburban studio. Night shooting has been scheduled but has not yet started. They are busy lighting the set and attending to the innumerable details which spring up for attention at the very last moment in the best-conducted studios. The atmosphere is dismal inside the studio. Outside, it is raining, which makes it worse. On a bench in the make-up room a huddled figure can be discerned, to sing and turning in that state of semi-consciousness which hovers on the edge of sleep.

It is Kishore Kumar, one of filmland's busiest stars. Through the past fortnight, he has been shooting night and day, continuously, and filling recording schedules in between. It's almost dark in the make-up room and in the deceptive gloom one seems to glimpse another figure beside the bench bending over the recumbent Kishore who turns over, unwilling to be disturbed.

Kishore-Kumar (irritably): For God's sake, let me sleep. As it is I get so little time...

Kishore G nguly: So little time is correct. Just 'cok at you. You're nervous. You're tired and jittery. You can't sit still a moment. And why? To what purpose? Have you thought of it?

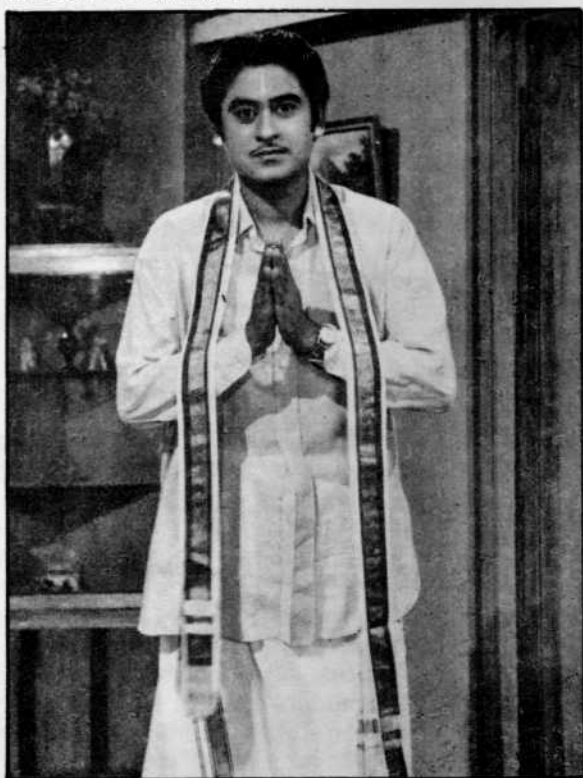
Kishore Kumar : What d'you mean, to what purpose? You ask me that? You, of all people, should know to what purpose. Haven't you been with me from the very beginning? Don't you know what I've been through? The terrible frustrations, the haunting spectre of failure dogging my footsteps, the fruitless struggle, the constant misery, the never-ending hardship and privation, and that perpetual nightmare, the grinding, pressing need for money, the terror of every waking moment? Those were bad days and you know the full horror of them because you went through them with me, every wretched hour of every single one of

them. I promised myself then that if ever I got the chance for which I was struggling I would work and work and work and never want for money again. Well, that time has come.

Kishore Gariguly: (Claps) Hear, hear. That was a pretty speech. But tell me, seriously now, how do you feel?

Kishore Kumar: Frightened. Terribly. I don't know what's going to happen. I'm caught in the middle of a vicious circle (laughs bitterly), a circle of my own making. (Sits up) It all started years ago, really. My brother Ashok was a famous star. I was struggling to make a mark as a playback singer. I never wanted to become an actor.

In 1956 - New Delhi



Those were harrowing days, and I never want to think of them again. They've made me what I am today. I remember how I used to stand at bus-stops, and stars - friends of my brother - would fly past in their limousines without so much as a glance at me. I wanted to sing and people would say, "Your voice is no good. *Us mein woh cheez nahin hai*. What *woh cheez* meant for them, God knows. The unbearable humiliation of it all. "Give us a voice test", they would say. And I swore to myself that the day would come when I'd make these very people eat humble pie, when the shoe would be on the other foot, when I would laugh at them.

Kishore Ganguly: (Reflectively) And you've done it all now, haven't you? All, that is, except the laugh. I imagine. You don't look much like laughing right now.

Kishore Kumar: What do you mean?

Kishore Ganguly: Never mind, I'll tell you later. Go on now. I see you're in the mood.

Kishore Kumar: (All the suppression of bitterness coming out of his voice and expression) The only thing that matters in the world is money. Money, money, money! And what brings it? Success. There is nothing else that counts. No sentiment, no decency, nothing. Just money and success. The magic, inseparable twins. There's nothing else that counts. You have them and you belong, you're somebody. You don't and you're nobody. People laugh at you, even spurn you. Oh, I've been through all that. And I kept telling myself, "You wait, the time is coming." The hope, the conviction that it would come, were the only things that kept me going. I remember the time I was called to give a voice test at Filmistan. Filmistan, mind you, where my closest relatives, Mukherjee and Ashok, were demi-gods. They too said, *Is mein woh cheez nahin hai*. Today Filmistan has offered me a fat contract. Mr Jalan tells me, *Arre, hum tujhe ko soldier pe bithaiga*. He meant shoulder. He said, *Aur*



*picturon mein tum stenotype lagta hai* - he meant stereotyped. *Hamare saath kaam karke dekho*. And I said, "On my terms, friend, on my terms. If they don't suit you, why, (shrugs) Too Lad!

Kishore Ganguly: (A shade of irony in his voice) So you're well up on top. That's good. You used to think that money and success were essential for security. You have them both now. Do you feel secure? Do you think it will last?

Kishore Kumar: No I have no illusions. Yesterday I was a nobody, today I am a star, tomorrow I may again not be one. I may become a featured artiste, revert to playback

In 1961 - Karodpati



singing or even get right out. I'll take my wife and son back home to Khandwa and work on our land there. I have been looking forward to going back for a long time. But while the sun shines, I'll make my hay - and save all of it.

Kishore Ganguly: Aren't you afraid people will call you a miser?

Kishore Kumar: Who cares? People revile you when you have no money and are jealous of you when you do. I'd rather have them jealous. Do you know...(pause)...I'd always have been poor but for my wife. She brought me luck. (Reflectively) My family was against my marrying her. I remember Sachin Dev Burman had got me a playback singing contract for **Bahar** in Madras. Before I went there, all our wedding plans were ready. On our last day in Madras, Sachin-da insisted that I stay on for a retake. I finished that retake that very evening and rushed back to Bombay. At the airport I was worried. Should I go to Worli (where my people lived) or should I go to Bandra (where my bride lived with her people)? If I went home I knew there would be no wedding. I went to Bandra.

Kishore Ganguly: And then?

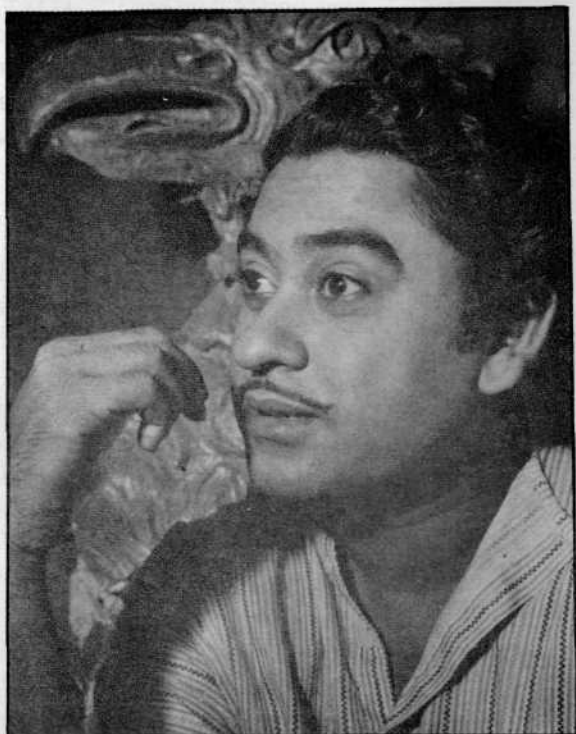
Kishore Kumar (Reflectively) And then my luck changed. I remember, long ago, they'd called me for a song in **Kaneez**. I vamped the song bum chick-a chick-a bum and yodelled it along. The style clicked and they asked me to picturise it. Then Ashok encouraged me. There's no future in playback singing, he said, switch over to acting, he advised. I was reluctant even then. Dadamoni put me on to Shaheed Latif who was to direct **Buzdil** and wanted me for the younger brother's part. I didn't want to act. But how could I refuse Ashok? He threatened to check up on whether I'd gone to see them or not. So I went, dressed in tatters. The producer received me in his office. "So, you're Ashok's brother. Why, you look just like him." Well? There was an awkward silence. Then I said

brightly, I'll sing. I began seriously enough, then suddenly switched to my bum-chicking. A lot of raised eyebrows, and I was out. Later, I did begin to act. My pictures fell like ninepins. Distributors looked askance at me, telling producers I was no good. "His pictures can't sell", they said.

Kishore Ganguly: And your marriage changed all that?

Kishore Kumar: Yes, for in the early days of our marriage people would say, "What! Ashok Kumar's brother - and no car?" We had only five thousand rupees in the bank, saved

In 1966



up after a lot of labour. One morning I saw an ad in the paper: Morris Minor, one thousand rupees. I read no further. Taking my wife and a friend, I went to the sales room. There I got a nasty jolt. The ad had really said a thousand rupees less than the listed price! Not wanting to make a fool of myself, I forked over four thousand rupees for the first payment and contracted to pay the rest in instalments. I still have that car today. It's my lucky car.

Kishore Ganguly: Yes, yes. Go on.

Kishore Kumar: Then my pictures began to click and soon I found myself a famous star. You know, when money first started rolling in, I'd developed such a complex about it that I'd sit for hours in a locked room and count the notes. I'd count them, then count them again. I became expert at flipping notes at top speed. Then to make sure the total was right, I'd count them again.

Kishore Ganguly: That's your feeling of insecurity again.

Kishore Kumar: Don't give me those high sounding words. I can tell you it gives me a wonderful feeling. Save! I told myself, save! It's the only sensible thing to do. Don't you see? I'm caught in a vicious circle. The more money I make, the more money I have to make. Much of it goes - to perpetually borrowing from friends, for petrol, clothes, this, that. Then there is our friend, the income tax man. When I returned from Madras the other day I found the familiar long envelope waiting for me. It contained a beautiful letter which actually began with, "Dear Sir". Then it politely said at the end that I'd have to pay some fantastic amount - or go to jail. And it actually ended, yours sincerely - it probably was, too.

Kishore Ganguly: So you take on all the pictures you can get. Don't you realise the penalty you're paying?

Day and night, from studio to studio with recording room sessions thrown in between. "Speak your dialogue", they say. And my head whirls with bits of dialogue from other sets, other pictures. They're there in my head, they buzz round, leaving no room for more dialogue to go in. (Frantically) Sometimes I feel I'm going crazy. All the time that never-ending whirl of shooting and more shooting. My wife and son have become strangers to me. I don't see them for days on end. I'm asleep in the morning when my son leaves for school and he's asleep when I come in at about 4 a.m. It's all gone, our beautiful home life, that peace and happiness for which I'd worked. For which everyone works. My wife is angry with me. I've been promising her a holiday in Kashmir. As a matter of fact, we were supposed to be in Kashmir this month. So I told my secretary, "Don't give anyone dates in September". Then they all started coming to me, "Kishore-da, dates do warna hum mar jayenge. Invariably they all say that if you don't give them dates. Not one of them actually dies. Someone's shooting is extended - "Kishore saab, please, please". And my wife is waiting, all dressed up and ready to keep a dinner engagement at 8 p.m. I roll home at 10 and she looks at me. What can I do? They couldn't finish the work. And it goes on and on like that. Just the other day my wife told me, "Buy a trailer and attach it to your car like the Americans do. You can sleep in it. After all, why waste petrol to come all the way home from one studio just to rush off to another? (Frowns) You realise what's happening, don't you? I can't get out. I can't get out.

Kishore Ganguly: You're making a lot of money. Perhaps you don't want to get out.

Kishore Kumar: It was for the money. But too much of it can be a curse too. I don't know how it will end. I know what I'll have to do. Pack up and run. Run with my family far away and leave everybody awake one fine morning and find me gone. When my wife learnt that we weren't going to Kashmir in September, she said, "Very well, I'm going to



my people in Calcutta. Join me when you're free."

Kishore Ganguly: You'll just go on and on as usual. Don't you know that stars come and go but the industry goes on like the brook in the poem? You're not exactly indispensable, you know.

Kishore Kumar: (Eagerly trying to convince the other) That's why! That's why I keep on working. By the time I'm through I hope to have enough money to retire in comfort for life.

You know, I'm going to make a 16 mm film reel which I'll show all the producers who come to sign me up. The moment they start saying, "It's a terrific role" and all that hokum, I'll say, just keep quiet about your role and see this. Then I'll show them the reel. Now this, I'll say, is my ten thousand rupee acting. This is my fifteen. This is twenty. This is fifty, and so on, until I reach a lakh (during this time he begins by imitating himself and, as the price goes up, imitates other highly paid stars including his brother). Take your pick, pay the money and go. There will be no talk of roles here.

Kishore Ganguly: You must try and change the pattern of your thoughts. You must stop working in these pictures...

Kishore Kumar: (Grimacing, interrupts quickly) No, no, no, no, no. You're wrong. No sensible pictures for me. The more fantastic a picture is, the more incoherent its plot, the better it runs. People like such pictures! They don't even bother to ask why one does this or that - so long as it makes them laugh. It's better to work in stupid pictures which click than in intelligent pictures which flop. Everything is in reverse, so why not us?

Kishore Ganguly: (regretfully) I know you don't like my advising you. But I think you'd better cry halt before things get out of hand. Go away somewhere, refashion your

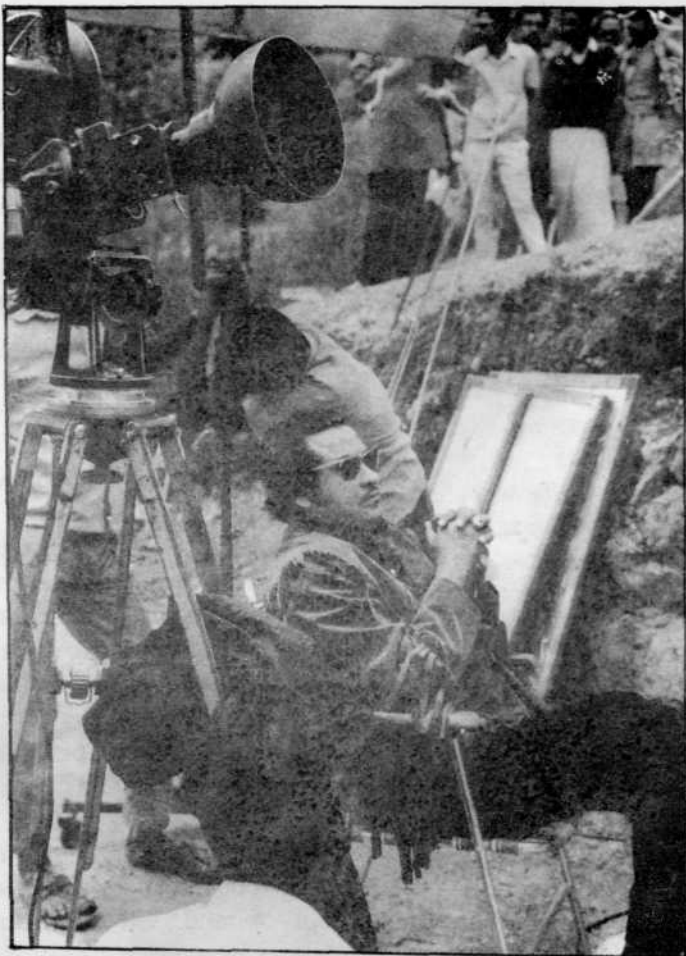


values, get back into contact with basic realities...

(A voice is heard offstage, crying, "Kishore saab! Shot ready! Kishore Kumar jumps up)

Kishore Kumar: (Pats him patronisingly) Now be off, old chap. There's a good fellow. Call again some time. Maybe we could spend a little more time together. But don't sermonise. It's boring. Heigh ho! Time's money. I'm off.

In 1971



# LEAVES FROM MY DIARY

Flimfare Oct - 10, 1956

I don't believe in diaries. My wife does. I've never kept one ever in my life. My wife always did. So I cannot do better than take the pages relating to my married life from my wife's diary and for the early years I draw from memory...

My earliest memory of Ashok, my eldest brother, was of a stranger. He was several years older than Alo (Anoop) and I. I thought that only Alo was my brother.

When Ashok, as a handsome lad of twenty one or twenty two came home from college for the holidays, I felt left out of my parents' affection. Who's this, I thought indignantly, who comes like this and has everyone dancing attendance on him?

Then I learnt he was my brother.

The earliest picture I have of myself shows me as a bright eyed, shy, skinny boy. I was mischievous, always up to tricks.

Some friends, Alo and I, rigged up a platform behind our house and played at staging dramas. One of us would be the hero, another the villain, a third the heroine, and so on. On those occasions one of the older boys performed an important function. He used to sit on a compound wall and keep a look out for father.

Father wanted us to study all the time.

I am in the fifth form, and very proud. Haven't I a brother, Ashok Kumar Ganguly of Khandwa, a big film star?

We learn that Ashok's first picture, **Jeevan Naiya**, is soon to be shown at Khandwa. My friends and I look forward keenly to seeing it. We are avid fans of Master Vithal and other two-fisted heroes of stunt films and we eagerly wait to see Big Brother laying a dozen villains low. The great day dawns. My friends and I, quite a crowd, go to the first show of **Jeevan Naiya**.

Three hours later, my friends come out of the theatre looking thoroughly bored and weary. Everyone is grumbling, casting accusing glances at me. I avoid their looks, and feel miserable myself.

Ashok in the picture is far, indeed, from the fighting hero we expected him to be. He is soft and sensitive, and even puts up with a slap from another character!

That very night I write Ashok a letter, telling him that he'd better swing his fists around a bit in his next picture, or else he will lose a number of fans in Khandwa.

Mother is a devout woman and performs all her religious duties. No sadhu who comes to our door is ever refused hospitality, though father does look askance at these visitors.

Once I remember a sadhu staying for a long time. Every morning, after puja, mother would touch the sadhu's feet and insist that father should do the same.

Father did, but invariably grumbled under his breath that, if anything, the sadhu should be touching his feet. I was very suspicious of this sadhu. What sort of a holy man was this, who consumed large quantities of fish and meat and drank liquor at our expense?

Father, Alo and I heaved a big sigh of relief when this 'holy man' left at last.

I am not very interested in my studies, though I do manage to do pretty well in my school. However, my bugbear is mathematics. I am weak in this subject and it is my stumbling block in the examination.

I am in the fifth form. The final examination comes round. As usual, I cannot solve a single question in the maths paper. I draw little faces in the margin, scribble a few rhyming couplets, make a pretence of working out a few sums, and hand in my paper.

After everyone comes out of the hall, I go up to one of my classmates who is very good at mathematics and tell him, "Please solve all these sums for me."

My friend does this for me on a spare examination paper, which I take home with me.

"Well son, how did you fare in mathematics?"

"Very well, Father", I reply, putting on my obedient son expression, "just see this".

I hand him the paper.

Father goes through it rapidly, his face breaking into a pleased smile. "Very good", he says, "very good indeed. You should get full marks".

Alo overhears that. He knows how bad I am in mathematics. He comes forward and tells father, "Don't believe him. Make him work them out before you again".

But father is too proud of me to do that. The holidays are wonderful. Then one morning, before results are due to be announced, I see the maths master coming towards our house.

happens.

Father welcomes him. He has brought some of the answer papers and places them before father.

"I would like you to correct them", he says.

Father is flattered, and begins to correct them.

"Very good", he murmurs, "This boy has done very well indeed." And takes up the next.

Then he stops. He comes to an unusual paper. He frowns at the sketches and scribbling.

In 1973



"Whose paper is this?"

"Go ahead and correct it", says the master.

Father makes short work of it, then says, "This child is useless. I can't understand how such children can go to school and never learn a thing. You ought to complain to his parents."

The moment of reckoning has arrived.

I stay away from the house the rest of the day and come home only late at night, when father's wrath has subsided.

---

Indre: Alo and I have joined the same college here. We share a room in the college hostel. I am shy and ill at ease at college - so many boys and girls.

Throughout my stay in college, I wear a black overcoat with pyjamas, muffler and sandals. I am never without that overcoat.

On my first day at college, an older student accosts me. He is well-dressed, in coat, trousers and tie. I take him to be a professor, and he speaks with authority, too.

"Listen, young fellow", he says. "Tell me, have the barbers gone on strike?"

I am puzzled and wonder why he asks me.

No", I stammer. "Not that I know of. I am not sure".

Not for a moment do I realise that he is pulling my leg. I always wear my hair long, a big mop of it on my neck.



‘hat door’.

I go to the door he points out, thinking perhaps that one of the professors wants me. When it opens a sea of girls' faces bursts upon my sight. They all laugh and giggle at how I am looking.

I am never without my overcoat - regardless of the weather or the occasion. At first they ask me about the overcoat. I tell them, "I am superstitious. It's my lucky overcoat. If I take it off, I will have bad luck". I'm so conscious of my skinny figure, that I am shy before the other boys and sneak into the bathroom late at night, two nights a week, to be he.

I want to play a football match, but nobody takes me seriously. "Take off your overcoat first", they tell me. Luckily a player falls ill and drops out of the team. The captain doesn't think I will be very good. But within a few minutes the spectators witness the strange sight of a player in overcoat and pyjamas scoring a goal.

It's the same with athletics. I participate in the track events wearing my overcoat.

I am fond of singing and everyone knows that I am Ashok Kumar's brother, so I am asked to sing at a college function. I tell my friends I will sing behind the curtain. They agree. Out of sheer nervousness, I begin my song on a higher note than I want. That gets me into trouble, because the other notes go higher and higher. When I am still in the middle of the song the curtain goes up. I perspire and cannot see anything because the drops run into my eyes. I somehow manage to get to the end of the song.

Then everyone crowds round me. "Very good", they say, "very good!".

Then the big day arrives. The curtain goes up. I have a clove in my mouth. It gets stuck in my throat in the middle

of a note. I sign frantically for the chorus to take over.

But they maintain a stony silence.

---

We have fun in the hostel. Alo and I have two harmoniums in our room. Every night some of the other boys join in singing **quawalis** and other noisy songs.

One night a hostel superintendent comes down to our room to put a stop to our noisy sessions. He reprimands us at first, but soon becomes interested in our songs. After that, he is a regular member of our parties.

A student in the MA class complains to the Superintendent about the music sessions in our room. Finding that the Superintendent does nothing about it, he takes recourse to other methods.

One morning we read a report in a newspaper, saying that a group of noisy lads have turned the hostel into a music room, disturbing students serious about their studies.

We hold a meeting to decide what to do.

Among us is a lanky, dreamy lad who writes Urdu poems. We ask him to compose a meaty piece lampooning the MA student.

The next night we hold one of our rowdiest sessions. Our poet has composed a stinging **quawali** which some thirty of us sing at the top of our voices, so that the student on the floor above can hear every word of it.

---

Bombay: Thoroughly tired of college in the second year, I give up my studies and come to Bombay. I have made up my mind about my career - it's to be playback singing. And it is here that I meet Ruma.

Ruma and I decide to get married. But my family is against the match. We fix a date for the marriage.

I am in Madras and I fly to Bombay on the day of my wedding. I arrive at Santa Cruz airport and look around apprehensively to see if anyone has come to take me home.

Then a stranger approaches me. "Come to Bandra", he whispers, "all the arrangements have been made".

I am in two minds. I am driving through Dadar and my mind is still undecided. Then I decide - I turn back and go to Bandra.

We are married by a civil ceremony. For a while we try to keep it a secret, but not from my family. My parents...

In - Badhti Ka Naam Daac hi



to see us and insist we get married a second time. They mean a religious ceremony. Ruma and I go through it, and hold the reception a month later.

And then we have an incident which occurs at the Bombay Talkie studio, Malad.

I was a callow youth. I was also a struggling playback singer. I moved to Bombay Talkie in order to spend more of my time there. My brother Ashok was working on the film **Mahal**.

It was a night shooting session. At night it was very lonely out there and the surroundings are eerie. I had taken to the studio that night a grotesque mask which had a pair of drooping moustaches. Putting it on, I wait for Madhubala to come upstairs to her make-up room. I am in the darkest corner of the corridor.

As soon as Madhubala comes to the door, I leap at her, growling like a wild animal.

Madhubala lets out a terrific scream. People come pounding up the stairs to see whether anyone has been murdered. At the head of them is my brother Ashok.

Seeing him, I take off my mask unwillingly and grin. But Ashok is in no mood to laugh. He gives me the worst berating of my life, and says, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, playing the fool like this? Don't come to this studio ever again".

The following night, having nothing else to do, I go again to the studio, a sadder and wiser man, and I sit at the foot of the stairs leading to the make-up room. It is late. Suddenly I hear wild screams from upstairs. "Good gracious, what's happened now?" I race up the stairs.

that mask of mine.

He sheepishly takes off the mask. It is my brother Ashok.

---

Darjeeling, 1954: My wife and I are at an outdoor shooting of a film. Every day we see Tenzing, the conqueror of Everest, passing our hotel.

One morning we are making purchases at a shop when Tenzing walks in. We were anxious to meet him. Fortunately he himself takes the initiative and asks the shop attendant to introduce him to us. Soon, we become friendly.

He poses for a photograph with us and we invite him to tea.

So many things clamour to be recorded in this diary - incidents of my childhood, the fragrance of vanished love, friends who have taken different paths in life. Then the picture of Arun Kumar, who died not long ago, comes to mind. He was the only one who encouraged me in my ambitions to be a singer, to have confidence in myself and my talent.

And today is another day, and the story of one's life is also one of many tomorrows. The best way to finish this diary is to leave it unfinished.

From  
Genius!  
- Kishore Kumar  
Music's  
Eccentric Superstar,  
speaks to  
Prtish Nandy  
- The Illustrated Weekly  
of India,

*I understand you are quitting Bombay and going away to Khandwa...*

Who can live in this stupid, friendless city where everyone seeks to exploit you every moment of the day? Can you trust anyone out here? Is anyone a friend you can count on? I'm determined to get out of this futile rat race and live as I'd always wanted to. In my native Khandwa, land of my forefathers. Who wants to die in this ugly city?

*Why did you come here in the first place?*

I would come to visit my brother, Ashok Kumar. He was such a big star in those days.

I thought he could introduce me to K. L. Saigal, who was my greatest idol. People says he used to sing through his nose. But so what? He was a great singer. Greater than anyone else.

*I believe you are planning to record an album of famous Saigal songs...*

They asked me to. I refused.

Why should I try to outsing him? Let him remain enshrined in our memory. Let his songs remain just his songs. Let not even one person say that Kishore Kumar sang them better.

*If you didn't like Bombay, why did you stay here? For fame? For money?*

I was conned into it. I only wanted to sing. Never to act. But somehow, thanks to the peculiar circumstances, I was persuaded to act in the movies.

I hated every moment of it, and tried virtually every trick possible to get out of it. I muffed my lines, pretended to be crazy, shaved my head off, played difficult, began yodelling



in the midst of tragic scenes, told Meena Kumari what I was supposed to tell Beena Rai in some other film. I screamed, ranted, went cuckoo. But who cared? They were just determined to make me a star.

*Why?*

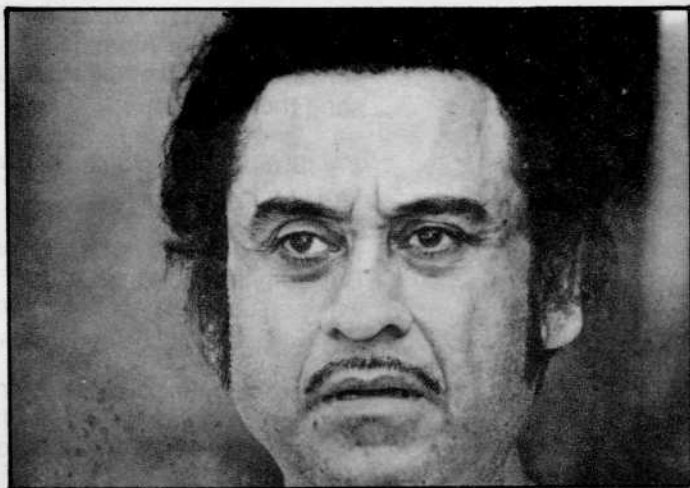
Because I was Dadamoni's brother. And he was a great hero.

*But you succeeded. After your fashion...*

Of course I did. I was the biggest draw after Dilip Kumar. There were so many films I was doing in those days that I had to run from one set to another, changing on the way. Imagine me. My shirt flying off, my trousers falling off, my wig coming off while I am running from one set to the other. Very often I'd mix my lines, look angry in the middle of a romantic scene or romantic in the middle of a fierce battle.

It was terrible and I hated it.

In 1984



It evoked nightmares of school. Directors were like school-teachers. Do this. Do that. Don't do this. Don't do that. I dreaded it. That's why I would often escape.

*Well, you are notorious for the trouble you give your directors and producers. Why is that?*

Nonsense. They give me trouble. You think they care a damn for me? I matter to them only because I sell. Who cared for me during my bad days?

*Is that why you prefer to be a loner?*

Look, I don't smoke, drink or socialise. I never go to parties. If that makes me a loner, fine. I am happy this way. I go to work and come back straight home. To watch my horror movies, play with my spooks, talk to my trees, sing.

In this avaricious world, every creative person is bound to be lonely. How can you deny me this right?

*You don't have many friends?*

None.

*That's rather sweeping.*

People bore me. Film people particularly bore me. I prefer talking to my trees.

*So you like nature?*

That's why I wanted to get away 'o Khandwa. I have lost all touch with nature out here.

I tried to dig a canal all around my bungalow, so that we could sail gondolas there. The municipality chap would sit and watch and nod his head disapprovingly, while my men would dig and dig. But it didn't work. One day, someone

found a hand - a skeletal hand, and some toes. After that, nobody wanted to dig any more.

Anoop, my second brother, came charging with Ganga water and started chanting mantras. He thought this house was built on a graveyard. Perhaps it is. But I lost the chance of making my home like Venice.

*People would have thought you crazy. In fact, they already do.*

Who says I am crazy? The world is crazy, not me.

*Why do you have this reputation for doing strange things?*

It all began with this girl who came to interview me. In those days I used to live alone. So she said, You must be very lonely. I said, No, let me introduce you to some of my friends. So I took her to the garden and introduced her to

In 1985



some of my friendlier trees. Janardan, Raghunandan, Gangadhar, Jagannath, Buddharam, Jhatpatajhatpatapat. I said they were my closest friends in this cruel world. She went off and wrote this bizarre piece, saying that I spent long evenings with my arms entwined around them. What's wrong with that, you tell me. What's wrong with making friends with trees?

*Nothing.*

Then there was this interior decorator chappie. A suited, bcoted Gujarati fellow who came to see me in a thick three piece woollen Saville Row suit in the middle of summer. And he began to lecture me about aesthetics, design, visual sense and all that. After listening to him for about half an hour and trying to figure out what he was saying through his peculiar American accent, I told him I wanted something very simple for my living room. Just water, several feet deep - and little boats floating around, instead of large sofas. I told him the centrepiece should be anchored down so that the tea-service could be placed on it and all of us could row up to it on our boats and take sips from our cups. But the boats should be properly balanced, I said, otherwise we might whizz past each other and then conversation could become quite difficult.

He looked a bit alarmed, but that alarm gave way to sheer horror when I began to describe the wall decor. I told him I wanted live crows hanging from the walls instead of paintings - since I liked nature so much. And, instead of fans, we could have monkeys farting from the ceiling.

That's when he started slowly backing out of the room, with a strange look in his eyes. The last I saw of him was him running out of the front gate, at a pace that would have put an electric train to shame. What's crazy about having a living room like that, you tell me? If he can wear a woollen three piece suit in the height of summer, why can't I have live crows on my walls?



# 5.

## PROJECTING AWAY



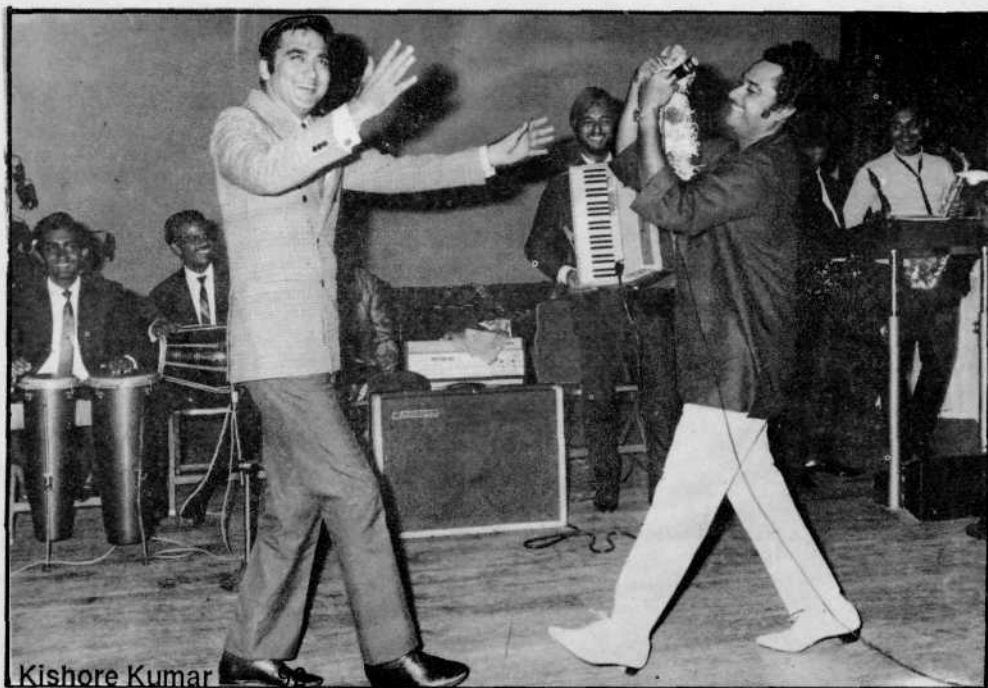


Deepa Gahlot

## Of Illusions And Illuminations

'Eccentric'; 'Madcap'; 'Genius', ~Gifted' - they couldn't usually think of other words to describe him. They hated and feared him because he refused to conform. He held the industry in contempt, said he had no friends, and never wanted any. He knew they grovelled because he had something they wanted - that elusive 'gift'. For him, this exchange did not conform to the relationships and the acquaintances the film industry usually fosters; they were 'motivated', he used to say.

Performing with Sunil Dutt



Kishore Kumar

He cultivated an image so they wouldn't take him for granted, some theorise. We set out to unravel bits of the Kishore Kumar mystey for this book. What was he really like, in his elusiveness? One had seen his outward mannerisms, from afar at a recording, on the stage, at awards functions. Caught off guard, usually with a contemplative look, but when the spotlights fell on him, a showman. Dancing, cavorting, giving 'those people' what they had come for. He was afraid of performing live, they also say. He had to be dragged into performing. Persuaded and cajoled and bribed, like a child. He evidently put on an act, he didn't add up to his performance. No wonder that he mocked his fans and friends and their worship and adulation.

His ideas about the hypocrisy and selfishness of the film folk must certainly have been true, if what we saw in our quest for the undercover Kishore Kumar is any evidence. Almost everyone we met said they were very close to him; others, who swore that he meant so much to them in his lifetime, were not terribly inclined to really speak about the man. There were those who couldn't dare displease him when he was alive, but now there were more important areas to appropriate than merely speak of a dead man.

Everyone we met said Kishore Kumar was quite a sane person, not in the least as eccentric as his reputation suggested. He would have hated this. After all, his image was at least as complex as the man himself, nurtured with care over the years. Some of the responses we received haven't been included, so manifestly false were they. Haven't we all heard stories of how he drove his producers and directors and co-stars round the bend? And of times when he came to the set with only half his face made up, and yet again with half his head shaved off, because he had been paid only half of what he was due? And there was the time he shaved off his hair because the director made him wait for a couple of days. Except the director, hardly to be outdone, made him complete his role with a cap on. Producers he met returned with wierd tales of how he made

them dance on tables, or wait in the living room while he crawled out from the rear on all fours. And the time he got an acquaintance arrested by shouting 'thief', because he failed to acknowledge him on the street. And again, when he drove off from a shot all the way to Khandala because the director forgot to say 'cut'. One producer, who took him to court for failing to obey orders, rued the day, because Kishore Kumar refused to do anything that day without being expressly ordered to do so by the producer - including getting cut of his car. He said he only harrassed people who owed him money. Actually he harrassed people pretty randomly, often for undefined reasons: he enjoyed watching the rich and powerful beg and plead. He had an element of sadism, but seldom of guilt. He would have been appalled at the many endearing explanations we received on just why he behaved the way he did.

He was a hypocrite too, or so it seemed, at any rate. He hated acting, and was forced into it; yet he became one of our biggest stars. He hated the money-mindedness of the



industry, but he wasn't any less obsessed with money. He said he didn't fancy his position, he threatened repeatedly to retire, but never did.

He couldn't admit to his own pleasure; he tended to play roles even in reality: the romantic, the poor little rich guy. But definitely he was not the childlike saint that people insist on casting him as, now that he's dead. He would be much amused watching all this from afar, perhaps saying an I Told You So as he sees his self-appointed friends shying away from discussing him as they encountered him.

On screen he was a riot, this undoubtedly. It's only now, years after the films were made, that you see his humour ahead of his times. The pranks in **Baap Re Baap**, as he sought to avoid a 'rich' marriage, the myriad and outlandish disguises in **Shararat**, leave you exhausted. He wasn't a classical hero, but he had the presence and grace to carry himself onscreen; you see how a later actor like Shammi Kapoor owed so much to him. But then he himself fancied the serious role, saw himself as a dramatic actor, this after all his reluctance to act in the first place.

He deservedly got all the fame and wealth as a singer, even though he wasn't a trained one. But he would have probably been an even greater actor, had he chosen to be; or even as a filmmaker, witness **Badhti Ka Naam Daadhi** which had all the makings of a masterpiece of comedy. He didn't give himself that chance, transferring much of his energy instead to that illusory image - of a larger-than-life figure eccentric in his hermit existence.

One couldn't distinguish the image from the man, after a while. He was what he wanted people to believe he was. And the quest to discover the man, either in spite of or through the image, proved a bit of a failure, for most of what one got were tired clichés and shifty evasions. He remained elusive, even in his death. It's up to us now to discover him afresh, in his songs, in his films.

## ASHOK KUMAR:



*When he was about one, I had gone away to Bombay. When he was four-or five, I used to go home to visit, he wouldn't believe that I was his brother. Because I visited rarely, my parents welcomed me heartily. He didn't like that. He used to say, "Who is this man? Why do you make kheer for him, why don't you give me any?"*

*At that time his throat was very bad. Nobody could believe that he would become a singer. He was coughing all the time. He was always hanging around mother asking for char paise to buy something or the other. One he came running when she was cutting vegetables and cut his toe off on the sickle. That toe is still preserved in our home at Khandwa. In those days there was nothing much to alleviate the pain. He wept continuously for a month in pain. By the time his wound healed his voice had cleared. And he started singing. Maybe God willed it this way. It*



*happens sometimes that when something untoward happens, something good also comes of it.*

*I was a trained singer and was always correcting him. He didn't like that one bit. He complained to mother that I didn't care for him, I always discouraged him by saying he sang badly. The feelings were right but the sur was not right for him. He later realised what I was saying. Then he never went out of tune.*

*Sur mein aise baithta tha ki bas! That was his very strong point. Even though he wasn't trained, he never went out of tune.*

*When he came here, he wanted to become a singer. During college vacations, he and Anoop used to come and stay with me. But he was very fond of singing. His favourite was Saigal, so whenever he was asked to sing, he would say: Kiska gana gaon? Saigal ka - char anna, Damamoni ka ek anna. Later Saigal's rate went up, to one rupee, mine remained at one anna.*

*Then there was this movie I was making, **Ziddi**. I gave him a small part of a mali. When Dev Anand walked past with the heroine, he had to just look at him. What he did was that he silently mouthed an expletive. When I scolded him, he was offended. Then slowly, I forced him into acting seriously.*

*Our father was a great comedian. When he went to court-- he was a lawyer like everyone else in the family--he used to make everyone, including the accused laugh. He took Kishore for outings carrying him on his shoulders. My father was bald and Kishore used to play the tabla on his head. He was loved and pampered by everyone in the family because he was the youngest. The money he got for his lunch, he used to spend on film song booklets. (The huge collection is still in his house.) That was when he got a thrashing at home.*



I had sung a song *Koi Hamdam na raha* for one of my earlier films (*Jeevan Naiya*). He sang it later for *Jhumroo*. When I heard him sing it, I told him he had got the raag all wrong. He replied, who cares? His version turned out to be better than mine. He sang it with so much feeling.

When he got the Lata Mangeshkar Award a couple of years ago, he sang a song *Ye jeevan hai* and held an audience of thirty thousand spellbound. I had to go on stage and ask him for an encore. He sang it again for me at home and he sang it so beautifully. I asked him why it didn't sound as good in the film? He replied, "Film mein to aise, hi gaa



diya tha." What he had done was sing it very softly and manipulate the accoustics in such a way that it sounded beautiful when he sang it on stage.

When he was in College, he set the complete Malthusian theory to music and sang it. That way he learnt it by heart also.

He set anything to music. He believed it was easy to memorise things if you sang them.

He was a very good comedian, I think. There may be people who think that he wasn't all that good, but a performance depends a lot on a role really. Actually all of us took after our father. We are all comedians, it just happened that he got into comedy and I became a serious actor.

Kishore wasn't in the least eccentric. It's just that he didn't like people cheating him of his dues. I'll tell you an incident. He dropped in at Shri Sound Studio where I was working on a film. One of his shootings was on at the other set, but he refused to shoot. The director, Raman came to me and requested me to persuade Kishore to shoot. It seems they owed him five thousand rupees, and promised to pay when he reported for shooting. The money wasn't there when he came to the studio, so he refused to shoot. When I told him to finish his work, he said, I know these people better, they will never give the money after the work is done. Because I had requested him he agreed, but when he reached the set he was asked to walk from one end of the room to the other. He did so turning cartwheels and then disappeared. I asked Raman why they hadn't given him the money, he replied that they didn't have any. Why had they lied to him. He knew that, that's why he refused to shoot. He didn't harass anyone who paid his dues. Once he made S.D. Narang chase him in his car and then turned around and said he didn't recognise him. He did these things. But most of the stories are exaggerated.

He was quite fed-up with being called a miser. So on an impulse, he got together as many Bengali families as he could and took them all on a picnic to Aurangabad. He blew up thousands of rupees and then asked, "Am I a kanjoos?"

The films he made himself were not so good. I think he made them to prove that he was a serious actor, and also to give a slip to the income tax people. To show some losses. He made a Bengali film **Looko Churi** for this purpose, but it turned out to be such a hit that he ended up paying double income tax. He persuaded me to stick on a long beard and make an appearance in **Badhti Ka Naam Daadhi**. It was a crazy film. After it was complete he invited Satyajit Ray to see it. He saw me and said, "You too!" Ray is related to Kishore, did you know? Kishore had lent him some money to complete the lab work of **Pather Panchali**.

#### KALYANJI:



It was very rare to find a playback singer who was also, an actor, director, composer, writer. So when we gave him a song, we never had to tell him how to get the right "expression" in his voice. He knew. The only thing he lacked was a classical training. Otherwise he was a perfect singer.

I remember having approached him first for a song for **Upkaar**--Kasme vaade pyar wafa sab, which was later sung by Manna Dey. At that time Kishore wasn't interested in singing. We tried hard to persuade him, but he didn't agree. Later he had some tax problems, and he was again approached by a common acquaintance, who was an organiser of stage shows, to perform on stage. He was terrified of the idea. He had a phobia about performing live which stayed till the end after he had done hundreds of stage shows.

He hated strangers. He was always suspicious of new faces. When he was to report for recording he wanted to know how many people would be there. If we said twelve, he would say why so many reduce them to five. So you can imagine how scared he was of appearing in stage. Before every stage show, he would say. Convince me about why I should go ahead with it. And we used to say, "Why should you be nervous in front of common people. You should be scared only if a greater singer than you is sitting in the front row. None of the people in the hall can ever hope to become Kishore Kumar in this life so what are you afraid of?" And he would be convinced for a while then start questioning again. He had to be cajoled, into doing it.

He had his moods, but that is an artist's privilege. He had to be treated like a child if you had to get him to do anything. He never gave us any trouble. Because we treated him like a child like a Kishore and gently persuaded him into doing our work. To get him to do what you wanted you had to tell him exactly the opposite. If you wanted to record on a day when he wasn't in a mood, we used to purposely say,

*let's hurry up and he would say, no why do you want to spoil the song. And he would stay as long as you wanted him. to.*

*The best thing about Kishore was that even though he wasn't a trained singer, he was always in sur. And if he was interrupted in between a song, he could pick up exactly where he had left off. Because he was an actor, he could sing to suit the voice of the actor he was singing for. He sang with smooth ease, as though he were speaking some dialogue.*

### **ANANDJI:**

*I remember the last two stage shows he did with us. We were scheduled to perform in the Gulf. Before going he saw the number eight somewhere and he said that the number eight wasn't lucky for him. He was 58 at the time and felt the year was inauspicious for him. When we reached there, he insisted on coming shopping with us and going out for dinner to an ordinary restaurant. He thoroughly enjoyed himself; letting his hair down for once.*

*After our return to India, we performed stage shows in Kutch. I went shopping at some little villages. He insisted on coming along. He said if I could come with you abroad, why not here? He roamed around with us in the heat and bought a few things. He was scheduled to do another show in Ahmedabad but he couldn't make it.*

*Thinking about all this later, it almost seems that he had a premonition about impending death. On the flight to the Gulf, he said to me that he had made his will and criticised his brother Ashok Kumar for not doing so. In his will he had also stated explicitly that he wanted to be taken to his hometown Khandwa to be cremated.*



## TANUJA:

Kishore was a very nice person ...But that eccentricity was more of a facade. Or maybe it wasn't. All artistes some time or the other need to hide their true emotions and he behaved the worst when he was sad. Then he behaved atrociously. I remember when I was shooting with him once, it was a seven o'clock shift. We were shooting in his house for *Door Ka Raahi*. I reached at about seven-thirty with make-up. He was sitting there on the sofa with his harmonium and he was singing and he said, "Aa Tanu baith, aaj gana sunata hoon tereko. Aaj mood hai mera gana gane ka." And do you know what songs he sang. All the sad songs he had ever sung, and the way he sang them it was clear that he felt every word of what he was singing. It was terrible, he had us all in tears. We couldn't shoot that evening.

I told him what is this, why are you making me cry, I don't want to cry. And he said, "Hota hai kabhi kabhi. You must share. I am feeling sad so I want you to share my sorrow." He wasn't as frivolous as he made people believe. He was a very deep person. Very much a family man... In his backyard he had a swing, a slide, a see-saw, a sand pit and at that time he had only one son. Amit was growing up so fast, he always said he wanted many more children. I never probed his moods, unless he chose to tell me himself. But he shared in his own way.

He was such a caring person. You know, my mother-in-law was his sister. She used to be very ill, and he used to come over to see her, sing to her, remind her of the old days in Khandwa and for a little while take her out of her misery.

I don't know why he put on this madcap act. Maybe as I said, like every other human being, he needed to hide some things. When he was in a good mood, he was great fun. He told us the most atrocious jokes. One day



got together to put up a show for me. They had this routine that they used to perform. Like they had this game - one said Pandurang, the other said Tukaram and they went on and on faster and faster, it was a competition to see who would fall out first. Then there was another routine he used to do, face each other and imitate the expression on the other's face like a mirror image. With split second timing. The understanding was fantastic. Then at the end of it when we were all in hysterics, he would ask, "Ab batao, hum donon bhaiyon mein se kaun zyada pagal hai?" That was the way he was and you had to take him as he was. As a co-star I would say, he was an excellent actor and very co-operative. His first love was acting, but he became famous as a singer. He was a brilliant singer. I don't think there has been another voice like his in this century. He was a very good director too, he knew what he wanted. But he is remembered only as a comedian. Maybe that was the purpose in his life - to make people laugh. It is always better to spread happiness, isn't it?

### Amit Khanna

He was a crazy guy. Once I met him at Mehboob Studio and he said, "Mere picture ki recording hai, zara ek gana likh do. I am already late. I have to sing his song and I am also the music director and lyricist and I still haven't written the song. Aur wahan mera bill chadh raha hai. At first I thought he was joking, then I realised he was serious. I wrote something and he worked out something from it. It was a song from **Shabash Daddy**. There was no question of credit, of course.

As a film maker, he knew the medium but he never applied himself seriously. I thought **Door Gagan Ki Chhaon Mein** was a pretty competent film, because he applied his mind seriously. Again I thought **Badhti Ka Naam Daadhi** could have been a very brilliant film if he had gone about it with a little seriousness, because it had that peculiar zany quality, that streak of madness that is absent from

any other film maker in India. A very Woody Allen kind of madness, peculiar, bizarre, going completely off tangent. It was something no one else could have thought of. But as I said, he could never apply himself properly. Whenever I talked to him, he could relate things well, he was aware of the medium, very alive.

I always found him a very warm person. I had a very good rapport with him. I remember, he must have sung over fifty songs written by me. At every recording, I told him very plainly, do this, do that, although I was never the music director. He would say sometimes, if I told him how to render a song, ye nahin hota, or this composition is not good, I don't like the tune; I can't do it, but he always did in the end. I always found this talk of his being money

His debut as Music Director - Neela Aasmaan



mind ed a bit exaggerated. He was a thorough professional. Sometimes he would behave very funnily with a producer for reasons best known to him but I never had any such experience in my own films. He never cribbed, why are you making me rehearse this song twenty times. He was one of the few singers whose voice improved with more takes, it didn't get tired very easily. He would always ask the details of the song, and one of the biggest advantages was that being an actor, he could always enact out his songs, which gave them a certain amount of appeal.

As a composer, he was very underrated, because again he never worked seriously. Just a few days before he died, we were thinking of doing an album together. A private album which I was going to write and he was going to compose. Because I was always telling him, you are a very talented composer, why not be a little more serious. So he said there is nothing to inspire me. As a composer he never really gave his best except in snatches, like for instance that song Koi hamdam na raha, which is absolutely an all time great. Or the title song from **Door Gagan Ki Chhaon Mein** - Aa milke chalen.

He gave himself credit for lyrics once in a while but that was just tomfoolery. He understood words, he had no pretensions of being a writer. In all my thirteen-fourteen years of association with him I never found him saying how he wanted a song written but he would never hesitate to say that he couldn't say a word properly and ask for it to be substituted with an easier word.

After Saigal, he was the only top class singer who wasn't trained. And he had a tremendous range. Whether it was Jhum jhum jhumroo, or Eena meena dika or Mere sapnon ki rani or a serious song like Dukhi man mere or songs from **Amar Prem**, he sang them all with equal elan. Of course now the choice is very limited, but some years ago when the song was written and composed, we would decide

who would sing it, Rafi or Kishore or Mukesh. So the typical Kishore song was one with a freewheeling style or one which required an element of pathos. Not sad, but that typical pathos that he had in his voice. It was a quality in his voice, Rafi was a better trained singer, who could have his voice tailored to a particular mood by a good composer. Kishore did it on his own. Because he was not professionally trained singer, he never took the whole thing seriously. Whatever natural gift he had, he used it. He was always scared if the song went too high, so he would say he couldn't do it and ask for the sur to be lowered.

He was a little eccentric like all artistes are, but that crazy image was one he liked to project. I came to know him much later in life when he was past all his peccadilloes. What I gathered was that he was a very lonely man. I remember visiting him one day, many years ago when he hadn't yet married Yogeeta Bali. It was a Sunday and he was sitting in a room full of toys. He was playing with this huge collection of battery-operated toys. He switched them all on together and it was a very surrealistic scene. I never found him crazy. One day I was to record for one of my films and I was told that the recording is cancelled. I went to his house and the watchmen wouldn't let me in. When I finally got through to him, he was very apologetic. He said he didn't know it was my recording and he came and sang.

The trouble with him was that never applied himself to much. Even as an actor he kept holding back. So he didn't put in any serious work, till his second revival as a singer in the late sixties when he started blossoming out, otherwise he lived a very cloistered existence. He only continued to sing for Dev Anand.

He started singing for Dev Anand when he was a young man looking for a job. His brother Ashok Kumar was the producer of the film *Ziddi*. Dev had done just one or two films till then, so he was also starting out and then there was young Kishore looking for a break. The first song he sang

was a serious one *Marne ki duaen kyon maangen, jeene ki tamanna kaun kare*. Then he continued to sing for Dev because S.D. Burman came into Navketan and he also had a liking for Kishore. When he became an actor himself he refused to sing for anyone else, till much later when he started singing regularly for Rajesh Khanna.

**The new Superstar and his new voice**  
- Rajesh Khanna and Kishore Kumar



# FILMOGRAPHY

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2022-2023  
2024-2025



FILMOGRAPHY  
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1948

**Ziddi**

Production: Bombay Talkie; Director: Shaheed Latif;  
Music: Khemchand Prakash; Cast: Dev Anand, Kamini  
Kaushal.

1951

**Andolan**

Production: Motwane Ltd; Director: Phani Muzumdar;  
Music: Pannalal Ghosh; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Shivraj,  
Sushama.

1952

**Cham Chama Cham**

Production: Mohan Pictures; Director: Santoshi; Music:  
O.P. Nayyar; Cast: Rehana, Kishore Kumar, Pran.

1953

**Ladki**

Production: A.V.M.; Director: M.V. Raman; Music: R.  
Sudarshanam, Dhaniram; Cast: Vyjayanthimala, Bharat  
Bhooshan.

**Lehren**

Production: New Sai Productions; Director: H.S. Rawail;  
Music: C. Ramachandra; Cast: Shyama, Kishore Kumar,  
Shakuntala.

1954

**Dhobi Doctor**

Production: Ranjit Movietone; Director: Phani Muzumdar;  
Music: Khayyam; Cast: Usha Kiron, Kishore Kumar, Kan-  
haiyalal.

**Ilzaam**

Production: Talwar Films; Director: R.C. Talwar; Music:  
Madan Mohan; Cast: Meena Kumari, Kishore Kumar,  
Shammi.

### **Miss Mala**

Production: Jayant Desai Productions; Director: Jayant Desai; Music: Chitragupta; Cast: Vyjayantimala, Kishore Kumar, Jeevan.

### **Naukri**

Production: Bimal Roy Productions; Director: Bimal Roy; Music: Salil Choudhury; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Sheila Ramani, Kanhaiyalal.



### **Naukri**

### **Paheli Jhalak**

Production: Jagat Pictures; Director: M.V. Raman; Music: C. Ramachandra; Cast: Vyjayantimala, Kishore Kumar, Pran.

1955

### **Baap Re Baap**

Production: Kardar Productions; Director: A.R. Kardar; Music: O.P. Nayyar; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Chand Usmani, Smriti Biswas.



### Char Paise

Production: National Movies; Director: N.K. Ziri; Music: V.D. Varman; Cast: Nimmi, Kishore Kumar, Roopmala.

### Madh Bhare Nain

Production: Fortune Films; Director: Hem Chander; Music: S.D. Burman; Cast: Beena Rai, Kishore Kumar, David, Durga Khote.



**Rukhsana**

Production: Talwar Films; Director: R C. Talwar; Music: Sajjad Hussein; Cast: Meena Kumari, Kishore Kumar, Shammi.

1956

**Aabroo**

Production: Uma Chitra; Director: Chaturbhuj Doshi; Music: Bulu C. Rani; Cast: Kamini Kaushal, Kishore Kumar, Smriti Biswas.

**Bhagambhag**

Production: Bhagwan Brothers; Director: Bhagwan; Music: O.P. Nayyar; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Shashikala, Master Bhagwan.

**Bhai Bhai**

Production: A.V.M.; Director: M.V. Raman; Music: Madan Mohan; Cast: Ashok Kumar, Kishore Kumar, Nimmi.

**Dhake Ki Malmal**

Production: Nanda Films; Director: J.K. Nanda; Music: O.P. Nayyar; Cast: Madhubala, Kishore Kumar, Ulhas, Om Prakash.

**Memsahib**

Production: Talwar Films; Director: R.C. Talwar; Music: Madan Mohan; Cast: Meena Kumari, Kishore Kumar, Shammi Kapoor.

**Naya Andaz**

Production: K. Amarnath Productions; Director: K. Amarnath; Music: O.P. Nayyar; Cast: Meena Kumari, Kishore Kumar, Pran, Johnny Walker.

**New Delhi**

Production: Deluxe Films; Director: Mohan Segal; Music: Shankar Jaikishen; Cast: Vyjayantimala, Kishore Kumar,



**New Delhi**

**Parivaar**

Production: Bimal Roy Productions; Director: Asit Sen;  
Music: Salil Choudhury; Cast: Usha Kiron, Durga Khote,  
Jairaj.

1957

**Asha**

Production: Raman Productions; Director: M.V. Raman,  
Music: C. Ramachandra; Cast: Vyjayantimala, Kishore  
Kumar, Om Prakash.

**Asha**



**Bandi**





**Bandi**

Production: Shree Pictures; Director: Satyen Bose; Music: Hemant Kumar; Cast: Ashok Kumar, Bina Rai; Kishore Kumar.

**Begunah**

Production: Roopkamal Chitra; Director: Narendra Suri; Music: Shankar Jaikishen; Cast: Shakila, Kishore Kumar, Raja Nene, Mubarak.

**Musafir**

Production: Film Group; Director: Hrishikesh Mukherjee; Music: Salil Choudhury; Cast: Suchitra Sen, Dilip Kumar, Kishore Kumar.

1958

**Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi**

Production: K.S. Pictures; Director: Satyen Bose; Music: S.D. Burman; Cast: Ashok Kumar, Kishore Kumar, Anoop Kumar, Madhubala.

**Chandan**

Production: Dossi Films; Director: M.V. Raman; Music: Madan Mohan; Cast: Nutan, Shyama, Kishore Kumar.

**Dilli Ka Thug**

Production: New Oriental Pictures; Director: S.D. Narang; Music: Ravi; Cast: Nutan, Kishore Kumar, Amar, Smriti Biswas.

**Kabhi Andhera, Kabhi Ujala**

Production: Mehtab Films; Director: C.P. Dixit; Music: O.P. Nayyar; Cast: Nutan, Kishore Kumar, Chitra, Shekhar.

**Raagini**

Production: Ashok Pictures; Director: Rakhan; Music: O.P. Nayyar; Cast: Ashok Kumar, Kishore Kumar, Padmini, Jabeen.

1959

**Chacha Lindabad**

Production: Light & Shade; Director: Om Prakash; Music: Madan Mohan; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Anita Guha, Jagirdar.

**Jaalsaaz**

Production: Lalit Kala Mandir; Director: Arvind Sen; Music: N. Dutta; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Mala Sinha, Pran, Nazir.

**Shararat**

Production: Roshni Films; Director: H.S. Rawail; Music: Shankar Jaikishen; Cast: Meena Kumari, Kishore Kumar, Raj Kumar, Kumkum.



1960

**Apna Haath Jagannath**

Production: De Lux Films; Director: Mohan Segal; Music: S.D. Burman; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Sayeeda Khan, Leela Chitnis.

**Bewaqaof**

Production: Johar Films; Director: I.S. Johar; Music: S.D. Burman; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Mala Sinha, I.S. Johar.

**Girlfriend**

Production: Basu Chitra Mandir; Director: Satyen Bose; Music: Hemant Kumar; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Waheeda Rehman, Nazir Hussein.

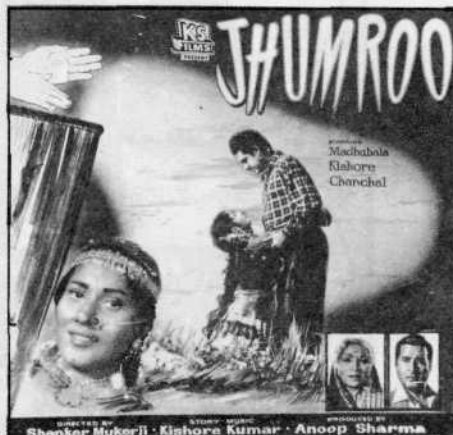
**Mehlon Ke Khwab**

Production: Madhubala Pvt Ltd; Director: Hyder; Music: S. Mohinder; Cast: Madhubala, Kishore Kumar, Pradeep Kumar.

1961

**Jhumroo**

Production: K.S. Films; Director: Shankar Mukherjee; Music: Kishore Kumar; Cast: Madhubala, Kishore Kumar, Chanchala, Jayant.



**Karodpati**

Production: Saigal Bros; Director: Mohan Segal; Music: Shankar Jaikishen; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Shashikala, Kumkum.

1962

**Bombay Ka Chor**

Production: New Oriental Pictures; Director: S.D. Narang; Music: Ravi; Cast: Mala Sinha, Kishore Kumar, Honey Irani.

**Half Ticket**

Production: Cine Technicians; Director: Kalidas; Music: Salil Choudhury; Cast: Madhubala, Kishore Kumar, Om Prakash.

**Manmauji**

Production: A.V.M.; Director: Krishnan Panju; Music: Madan Mohan; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Sadhana, Naaz, Achala Sachdev.

**Naughty Boy**

Production: Shakti Films; Director: Shakti Samanta; Music: S.D. Burman; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Kalpana, Om Prakash.

**Rangoli**

Production: R.S.B. Films; Director: Amar Kumar; Music: Shankar Jaikishen; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Vyjayantimala, Nazir Hussein.

1963

**Ek Raaz**

Production: A.G. Films; Director: Shakti Samanta; Music: Chitragupta; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Jamuna, Lalita Pawar.

1964

**Baghi Shahzada**

Production: Gee Pee Films; Director: Maruti; Music: Bipin; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Kumkum, Anwar.

### **Door Gagan Ki Chaon Mein**

Production: Kishore Films; Director and Music: Kishore Kumar; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Supriya Choudhury, Amit Ganguly.



### **Mr X In Bombay**

Production: Thakkar Films; Director: Shantilal Soni; Music: Laxmikant Pyarelal; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Kumkum, Mohan Chotti.



1965

**Hum Sub Ustad Hain**

Production: Sangam Film.; Director: Maruti; Music: Laxmi-kant Pyarelal; Cast: Kishore Kuma , Dara Singh, Sheikh Mukhtar.

**Shreeman Funtoosh**

Production: S.B. Productions; Director: Shantilal Soni; Music: Laxmikant Pyarelal; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Kumkum, Anoop Kumar.

1966

**Akalmand**

Production: Mukul Pictures; Director: Roop K. Shorey; Music: O.P. Nayyar; Cast: Kishore Kumar, I.S. Johar, Sonia Sahani.

**Ladka Ladki**

Production: Bright Films; Director: Soni Haksar; Music: Madan Mohan; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Mumtaz, I.S. Johar.

**Pyar Kiya Jaa**

Production: Chitralaya; Director: Sridhar; Music: Laxmi-kant Pyarelal; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Shashi Kapoor, Kalpana, Mehmood.

1967

**Albela Mastana**

Production: Pragna Pictures; Director: B.J. Patel; Music: N. Dutta; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Asha Nadkarni, Bhagwan.

**Duniya Nachegi**

Production: Gay Films; Director: K. Pervez; Music: Laxmi-kant Pyarelal; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Kumkum, Mukri.

**Hum Do Daku**

Production: Kishore Films; Director and Music: Kishore Kumar; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Anoop Kumar, Ganga,



1968

**Do Dune Chaar**

Production: Bimal Roy Productions; Director: Debu Sen;  
Music: Hemant Kumar; Cast: Kishore KUMAR, Tanuja,  
Sudha Rani.

**Hai Mera Dil**

Production: Manohar Films; Director: Ved-Madan; Music:  
Usha KHanna; Cast: Kishore Kumar, Kumkum, I.S. Johar,  
Prem Chopra.

**Padosan**

Production: Mehmood Productions; Director: Jyoti  
Swaroop; Music: R.D. Burman; Cast: Sunil Dutt, Saira  
Banu, Mehmood, Kishore Kumar.

**Sadhu Aur Shaitan**

Production: Bhim Singh-Mehmood; Director: Bhim Singh;  
Music: Laxmikant-Pyarelal; Cast: Mehmood, Bharati, Kis-  
hore KUMAR, Om Prakash, Pran.

**Shrimanji**

Production: Mukul Enterprises; Director: Ram Dayal;  
Music: O.P. Nayyar; Cast: Kishore KUMAR, I.S. Johar,  
Shahida.

1971

**Door Ka Rahi**

Production : Kishore Films; Director and Music : Kishore  
Kumar; Cast : Amit Kumar, Tanuja, Ashok Kumar , Kishore  
Kumar.

1974

**Badhti Ka Naam Daadhi**

Production : Kishore Films; Director and Music : Kishore  
Kumar, Cast: Kishore Kumar, I. S. Johar, Amit Kumar,  
Sheetal



**Badhti Ka Naam Daadhi**

1979

**Shabash Daddy**

Production : Kishore Films; Director and Music : Kishore Kumar; Cast : Kishore Kumar, Yogeeta Bali, Amit Kumar, Mehmood.

1980

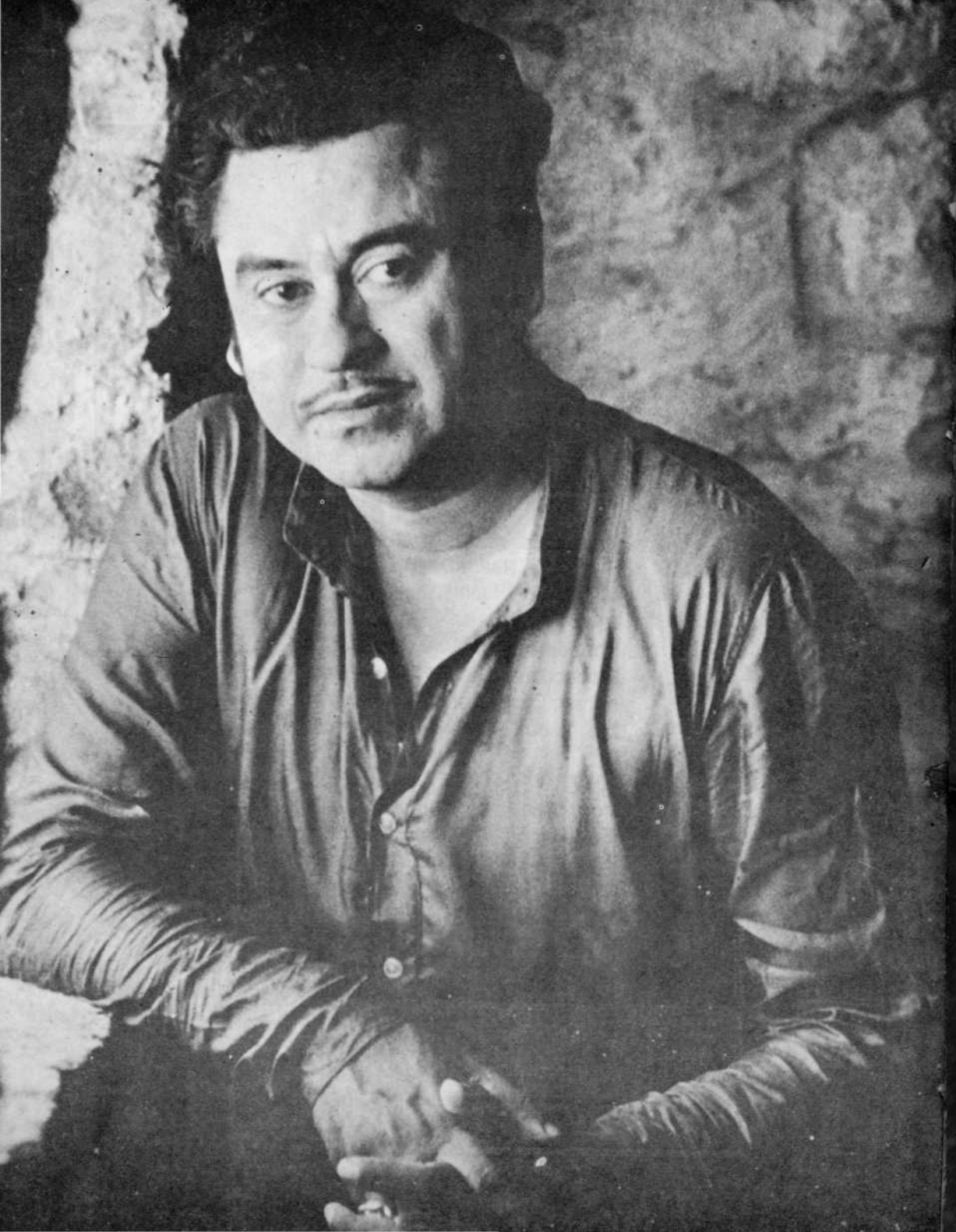
**Door Waadiyon Mein Kahin**

Production : Kishore Films, Director and Music : Kishore Kumar; Cast : Kishore Kumar, Bindu

1982

**Chalti Ka Naam Zindagi**

Production : Kishore Films; Director and Music : Kishore Kumar; Cast : Ashok Kumar, Kishore Kumar, Anoop Kumar, Reeta Bhaduri.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In this, the first foray of the Research Centre For Cinema Studies into the commercial film industry, we found ourselves on untrodden territory.

We would certainly not have managed to organise so large a retrospective, but for the support and assistance of several within the industry, who gave us unstinted support and suggestions when we needed them most.

Thanks to Amit Kumar, Mr Makhan, Ashok Kumar for everything.

To the distributors of the films who gave us permission.

To the Nehru Centre authorities for giving us consecutive dates and concessional charges for possibly the best projection in the city.

To Amit Tyagi and Deepa Gahlot for unstinted effort.

As usual to Screen Unit colleagues.

And, not for the last time, to Mr P.K. Nair, of the National Film Archive, for everything.

To the Times of India, to Praddep-Guha, Neerja Shah, Sharan Hemnady and Ritu Yadav for sustaining the effort through.

As'ish Rajadhyasha  
Bombay Oct '88.